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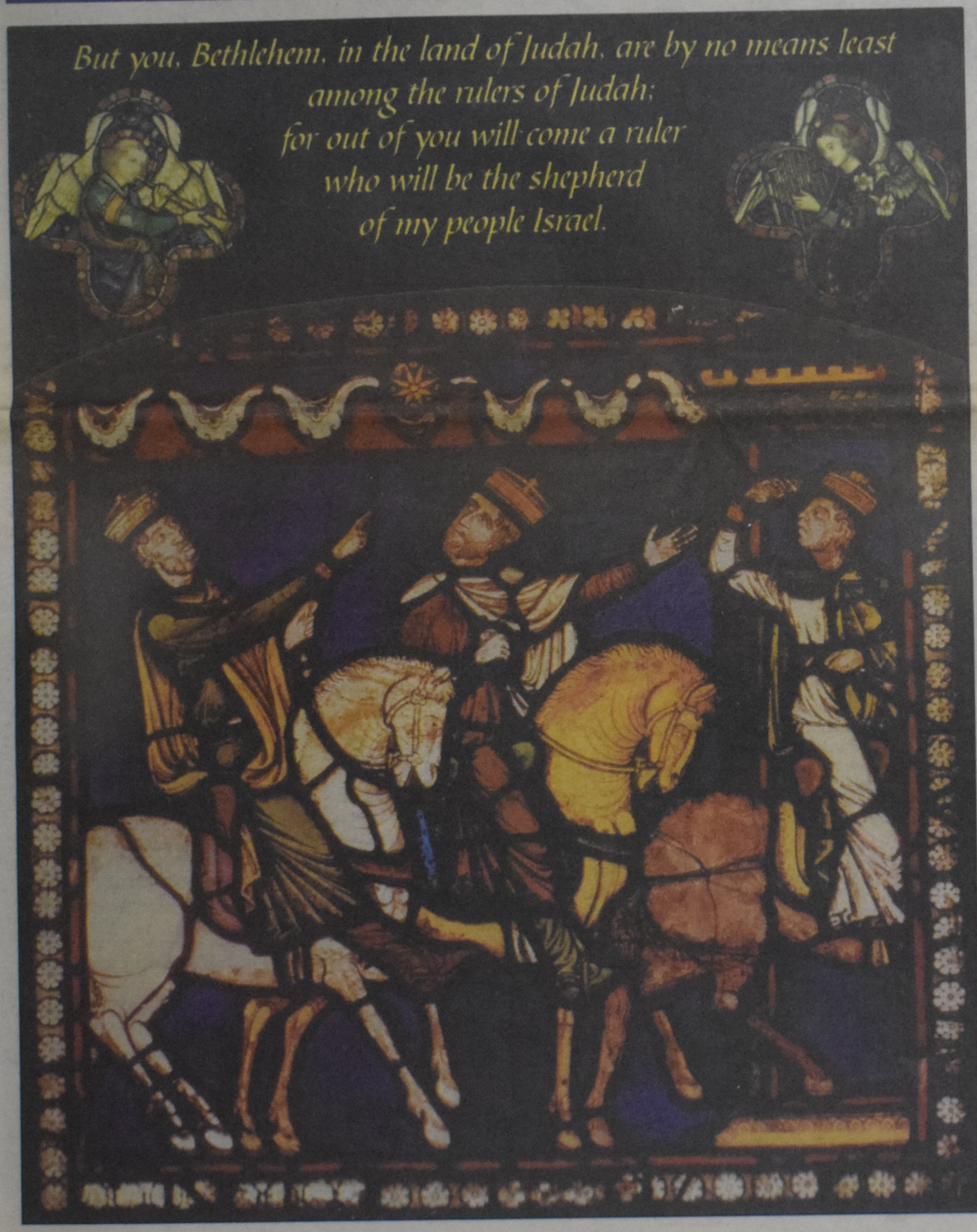
But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least
among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will be the shepherd
of my people Israel.

Christmas issue highlights

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Meditation

But thou, Bethlehem, Ephratah . . . . Bitter and sweet

Louis Tamminga *(From the 1963 Christmas issue)*

Christmas is a season of intimate warmth. But if we are honest and take the trouble to face the facts we cannot escape something painful in it all.

We sing of tidings of great joy. But many suffer in the hospitals. Many families have problems that defy a solution. Many people are at the end of a dead-end road. A mother waits till deep in the night for her alcoholic husband to come home . . . together with her twelve-year old son.

She undresses him and in despair writes a letter to Ann Landers.

I have never seen the beautiful, without a scar of imperfection.
I have never seen love, without suffering.
I have never seen holiness, without the shadow of sin.
I have never seen peace, without trial.

~

Do you think that it has always been that way?

Ages before the birth of Christ the prophet Micah spoke of it. The nation was suffering much in those days: sickness, enemies, fear and pain. The nation cried unto Jehovah, but he did not answer. Every light snuffed out, every road leading nowhere.

In those days Micah stood up and uttered that strange message, a cry wrested from the bosom of a nation in the throes of pain:

But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah . . .

That was the birth of Christ. Christmas is where the bitter meets the sweet. Bethlehem is the town of the bitter and the sweet.

~

You know the history of Bethlehem, don't you?

It was here that Jacob and his family pitched their tents and tended their sheep. This was hope and sweetness. For out of this family the Shiloh would be born, the Messiah of God.

But in giving birth to the last son of Jacob, Rachel died. In the fields of Ephratah Jacob buried Rachel. Her tomb is still pointed out, a memorial of a man's great love and a young woman's untimely death while on a journey.

There in the fields of Ephratah Jacob wept alone.
Bethlehem . . . hope and death . . . sweet and bitter.

~

Bethlehem Ephratah is also the scene of human failure and God's grace.

Here it was that Elimelech and Naomi made up their minds to sever their ties with the nation of God and move to Moab when hunger struck the land.

An old and broken Naomi returned to Bethlehem. "Call me Mara," she said. "The Almighty has done me bitterness!" But she failed to see how God was weaving advent history through it all.

Bethlehem became the scene of tender, compassionate love. Boaz married Ruth. And the Lord blessed them with a son. This son was to be one of the fathers of Christ.

Bethlehem, town of failure . . . town of grace.

A young boy watched over his Father's flock on Ephratah's hillside. His name was David, great-grandson of Ruth and Boaz. He played the harp and sang psalms. Unknowingly, perhaps, he voiced the sweetness of Messianic expectation, longing for the coming of his Son.

But that same David would yet become painfully aware of the hideous powers of sin that lurked deep in his heart.

Ephratah. . .
light of hope,
darkness of sin.

Time goes on.

A massive highway curves around the regions of Ephratah, linking Damascus with Alexandria, leaving Bethlehem in the hinterland where it belongs. . .
a little town
of no importance.

Chariots of the Imperial Guard flash by. Roman legions march along in rigid ranks carrying high the bright eagle standards above glistening spears.

From a distance shepherds of Bethlehem look on.

. . . But thou Bethlehem Ephratah, how small thou art among the thousands of Judah, how small among the millions of the Imperium.

Bethlehem Ephratah is the fullness of imperfection, of pain, of weakness, of failure, of hope dashed to pieces, of trials and of pain . . . reaching out for fulfilment, the desperate cry of the Old Testament for the coming of the Messiah Redeemer!

In the settling dust a man and a woman turn off the main highway and set their feet on the trail that leads to little Bethlehem, tucked away among the hills.

A man and a woman . . . .

Poor people, you might say. There will be no place for them in the inn. Soon the woman will have a child. Yes, of course, poor people. When you think of their worries about lodging and their fears concerning what is about to happen, about the power of Rome, about sin gone rampant . . . .

Yes, but don't fail to see the hand of God in all this bitterness. For an angel had spoken to Mary. The words still resound in her heart: "He shall save his people . . . . He shall save . . . ."

Bitter and sweet. . . .

But do you see how the Son of God was born into all the bitterness of this hopelessness, of this brokenness, of this turmoil?

Even before he was born, they pass the Taj Mahal, Rachel's tomb. She died. Tonight you will have your Child, Mary.

That whole split since paradise, via countless generations to Bethlehem, that whole agonizing tension of hope and despair came upon him! He stood at the border of death and life, he the holiness of God stood at the threshold of damnation, in our stead. He fought the conflict between light and darkness, in our place.

For over the manger falls the shadow of the cross.
There he endured till the bitter end.
There victory was his!

~

From there on everything has become different.

His victory extends itself through us, members of his body, as a battle to bring his victory home.

Until the triumphant coming of Christ to judge the living and the dead. As such the Bethlehem trail winds itself across battlefields which involve our whole existence, our every experience and our total outlook.

But as victors, not as those in abiding darkness.

Every carol wasted over the heads of busy shoppers is now, unwittingly, a harbinger of the victorious completion of the world drama.

The morning stars sang together,
And all the sons of God shout for joy.

~

Bethlehem sets the pace for the ages. Already from the birth of Christ on. For at that early beginning of victory the world drew together around his manger in confession and curse. For there the burly shepherds in home-spun clothes looked down in wonderment. Soon the intelligentsia of the Orient would kneel down there, bringing of their financial holdings.

But listen!

There in a distance . . . the horses' hasty hoofs. . . Herod's mercenaries . . . swords gleaming in the moonlight . . . spreading death and horror among the Innocents.

What is the death of a few scores of peasant kids to the Edomite hoping to destroy the young Child whom he feared?

Amid these extremes we sit down and celebrate the birth of the Redeemer. Even around candle-lit tables. But not far from this conflict . . . in, around and above us. And heaven not far from us. God no longer unaware of tears and laughter.

Come, then, make your way to Bethlehem.

Here is hope and here is power,
This is the world's tremendous hour;
Jesus, Christ of God descends
And our night of darkness ends.

The night before Christmas....

Instead of providing further background and context to help us understand a couple of the stories currently in the news, I thought it more in tune with the Christmas theme to gather instead a few exemplary stories that reflect the tenor of these our times. Louis Tamminga's meditation asks us to look around to see the condition of the world in which the glad tidings are proclaimed.

In this Christmas season, despite the extravagant celebrations, the politically correct thing to do is to suppress the Christian character of the holiday – to avoid manger scenes and send cards that avoid religious themes: Holiday Greetings instead of Merry Christmas. No doubt new lawsuits will be launched that seek to expunge from the public square any and all references to the true reason for celebrating – not just this special birthday but everything from creation to our humanity.

Calgary Stampede, Indian life romanticized

A Jewish exodus?

The *National Post* carried two stories about a growing Jewish exodus from France because anti-Semitism is making life difficult, if not dangerous, for them there.

A Jewish school in France is protected by barricades that keep cars at a safe distance and the gates are guarded by a private security firm. The windows are bullet proof and security cameras scour the perimeter. Children are taught to travel in groups.

Many orthodox Jews avoid wearing the traditional sidelocks because it makes them an obvious target.

Most of the anti-Jewish violence in France is Muslim in origin, worsening with the Palestinian intifada. Jewish synagogues, schools, businesses and cemeteries have been subjected to vandalism and fire-bombings since long before the recent spate of riots. The French authorities seem reluctant or unable to do much about it. In fact, France officially denies that there is a problem. President Chirac recently declared that there was no anti-Semitism in France.

Of those leaving France, most are leaving not because the situation has become intolerable for them today, but because they fear for the future of their children. Once again the people who gave birth to the Messiah are asking whether there is room for them in Europe. Quite a number are emigrating, most to Israel but some are also coming to Canada, especially to French-speaking Canada.

Lest we be quick to boast, let's remember that speakers who were scheduled to make a case for Israel at academic institutions in Canada have either not been invited are have been disinvited due to threats of violence.

Anti-pro-life violence

But such surrender of freedom to threats of violence have not only happened to pro-Israeli speakers. It recently happened also to a pro-life convention – in Montreal, the city most Jewish emigres are moving to. The Canadian National Pro-Life Conference, an annual affair, had been scheduled to take place at the St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal, Quebec, Nov. 17-19. On the day before the event, the rector canceled because of fears of violence. Pro-choice and other activists had threatened to disrupt the meeting.

At the last moment the conference had to be moved to a Protestant church in the suburbs. A bus load of about 40 protesters arrived waving banners and signs, banging drums and chanting slogans labeling pro-life advocates "fascists." One of their banners read, "Ah! If only Mary (the mother of Jesus) had known about abortion."

After milling around and engaging in a fight with police – just long enough to provide footage for the three waiting television networks – the group returned to their bus and left.

A few nights later, one of the popular television dramas focused on the violence implicit in the "fundamentalism" that calls for chastity and that would limit abortion.

Compensating abused natives

On Nov. 23 the federal government announced that it is providing over $2 billion in compensation for those natives who suffered abuse decades ago as students of native residential schools. More than 80,000 former students are eligible, especially since the definition of abuse has become so broad that the entire venture is now defined as abusive. Those who suffered sexual assault or serious physical abuse may sue for compensation beyond this basic amount. In addition, another $60 million has been promised for a truth-and-reconciliation commission to examine the abuses that occurred in the schools. The agreement also provides for the creation of a $125 million endowment for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, as well as $20 million for commemoration projects.

Residential schools started operating even before Confederation as a joint venture between the government and religious or missionary organizations. They were seen as a way of meeting federal obligations under the Indian Act and to help integrate Aboriginals into Canadian society.

Redressing injustice

Justice done at last? Perhaps – to a very limited extent.

The recent scandal associated with polluted water on the native reservation at Kashechewan raises questions. Ottawa was blamed for failing to dish out enough funding, but poverty, squalor and an aimlessness that breeds alcoholism and suicide are endemic in most reservations.

There is little left of the traditional native way of life romanticized in movies and schools as exemplary in its respect for nature. It is impossible to live off the land and there are far too few jobs in the remote areas where most of the reservations are located.

Treating the native reservations as distinct "nations" has fared no better than the previous program of forcible assimilation. No matter how much Ottawa keeps pumping into the system of reservations, it remains a system that makes most of the recipients dependent on continuing welfare and that offers little hope of a brighter, more purposeful future.

Martin and Bush in happier times

In a National Post opinion piece, Jonathan Kay asks how responsible is it "to encourage Aboriginals to remain encamped in destitute, disease-ridden Bantustans?" Yet, the only politically correct thing has become to call for more subsidies while condemning assimilation into modern society as a form of cultural genocide.

A little spadework on the part of a couple of journalists reveals that almost all the outrage heaped on the government by the opinion makers is simply a recycling of old slogans. Not only was polluted water not to blame for most of the ills trotted out for the media, the community had received a state-of-the-art water treatment facility that did not and does not function as it should because it is mismanaged.

One of the lessons of Kashechewan, surely, is that pouring ever larger amounts of money into an inherently untenable situation does little to correct the problem. As I write a first ministers' conference on aboriginal issues is beginning in Kelowna, B.C. Since keeping the reservation system is in the interests of aboriginal leaders, there is little danger that the meetings will do much more than discuss how much more money is needed to keep them afloat till the next major infusion of cash.

Such infusions are an expression of human compassion and of the longing for justice – but are they successful in establishing a justice that leads to shalom and hope?

Receiving justice

Canadians feel that they are on the receiving end of injustice in the softwood dispute. Knowing the intense feeling among Canadians on the issue Prime Minister Paul Martin has been raising it everywhere in his travels. On Nov. 22 the US declared that it will comply with the Nafta ruling and reduce the duties on softwood lumber. Actually, however, an appeal is in the works – and in the meantime the duties will continue to be collected until a final settlement is reached. So justice seems to be on the horizon for Canada – albeit an ever-receding horizon.

An aide package to lumbering communi-

Continued on p. 4...

News

Good old-fashioned hatred is the culprit

Bert Witvoet

In France, people are still reeling from the aftermath of riots. In Toronto, it's the shooting deaths, mostly of blacks by blacks. The latest act of violence there seems to have taken even police and politicians by surprise. I'm talking about the one that took place on the steps of a Seventh-Day Adventist church during the funeral service of a young man who was murdered a week earlier, probably by the same group of individuals. In both cases, authorities talk about adverse social conditions – lack of integration, breakdown of communities, unemployment.

Without denying the effects of such social conditions, it is, nevertheless, refreshing to hear French philosopher Andre Glucksmann identify the main cause not as social conditions but as the ancient primal force of hatred (Nov. 10 article in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*). By referring to hatred as the main cause, he places the problem on the spiritual level, where it belongs first of all. He describes the three stages that go into the unleashing of the kind of violence we have seen in France as: "pain that is directed inwards in the form of self-pity, which then unloads as rage and hatred into violence and finally becomes the desire to destroy which can go to the point of self-destruction." (Although the explanation has strong psychological overtones and is given by a philosopher, it does not make it less spiritual.)

What's going in France, he says, is basically suicidal. In other words, these car- and business-burning youth suffer from self-pity caused by pain, which becomes hatred expressing itself in suicidal violence.

The same can be said of what happens daily in Iraq and the Middle East. I'm talking about suicide bombings. But I think it also explains what is happening in cities like Toronto. Gangs of youth are killing each other, and they don't seem to be afraid of death themselves. This explains why some youth went to a funeral and killed a friend of the deceased in broad daylight. Everyone laments the fact that this took place at a church, a so-called "sacred" place. Personally, I don't attach any importance to the "sacredness" of the place, except to say that it shows a complete disconnect between these hate-filled individuals and the rest of society. Murder in the cathedral or in a pub is still murder – the willful destruction of an image-bearer of God. It's a clear sign of hatred against God and his creation.

That's not to say that our society does not itself suffer from too much hatred in general. The difference between these youth and society is not absolute. Our society has generated this hatred through its slightly milder forms of hatred, also called discrimination, neglect, greed, selfishness and injustice. The Bible is quite clear that anyone who does not love his neighbor, hates his neighbor. Our society is characterized by a lot of hatred. It's especially evident in the power structures, but it has attached itself to individuals and groups as well.

I don't want to minimize the complexity of this social outburst of hatred, but I do know one thing: the answer does not lie in pouring more money into problem situations –like the native condition of poverty and alcoholism. Politicians cannot solve these problems simply by making more promises of money. A lot of that is mere image dressing, which becomes even more sinister because it prevents us from addressing the root problems. Money is a small part of the solution. The greater part is doing justice, acknowledging real grievances, adding human involvement and solidarity with those who feel sorry for themselves because of the real pain they subconsciously feel at not having been loved.

I believe that the Body of Christ is uniquely qualified to tackle this complex problem with the full-bodied approach of gospel message and gospel action. But we also need to repent as a nation and as a society. We need to tackle these situations in smaller portions, one locality at a time as well as at the corporate and government levels.

Secular groups can also bring about improvements. God's Spirit is at work wherever people obey the laws for life: community and solidarity, unselfish sharing of resources, especially human resources. But we as Christians must lead the way. And I think we do.

I'm grateful for the work done by the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee and the Mennonite Central Committee. Organizations like Citizens for Public Justice also contribute to the raising of political and social awareness in this area. But do we as ordinary church members do enough in this area of justice and compassion?

May God have mercy on our hate-filled society.

The night before Christmas ... *continued from p.3*

ties suffering from a loss of jobs was condemned south of the border as unjust for it was seen as simply another way to subsidize our lumber industry and avoid the creation of "a level playing field." Oh, who will give us justice?

An end to evil

After well over 2,000 American deaths and many more maimed and wounded, Americans are quickly growing weary of the war of attrition in Iraq that is making reconstruction and normalization of life impossible. After a quick initial victory over Saddam's forces, the US has not been able to play the role of liberator it so badly wanted and needed to play in the Middle East. By means of suicide bombings, constant terror strikes on Iraqis and others engaged in reconstruction efforts as well as repeated ambushes of American patrols, the so-called insurrectionists have forced the Americans into the role of bumbling occupier.

Although it is impossible to undertake the superhuman task of "nation-building" without some degree of bumbling, the US has committed more than its fair share. Moreover, this has turned into a "war" that has no heroes and in which stories focusing on successful reconstruction efforts are seen as catering to the Bush administration. Consequently, for the most part the media report only on the terror and the violence – and there is more than enough of it to keep reporters occupied.

Even the positive events of elections and a draft of a democratic constitution have enough drawbacks to raise questions whether the country will ever again become a viable governable entity. Every step forward also raises the spectre of a possible civil war between the three major factions, and the question of whether Islam is capable of sustaining a democracy in which there will be equality for women and for religious minorities is far from decided.

Waging a war abroad while facing constant charges at home that the reasons for going to war are a pack of lies, the Bush administration has appeared brittle and adrift of late. All it can seem to muster is heroic assertions that things are improving in Iraq and that America's resolve is firm. The attempt to remain optimistic and put a good face on things begins to sound false after a while. It falls into the category of "spin" and when spin is contradicted by too many facts, it begins to ring like falsehood.

Increasingly, the Bush administration's statements on Iraq are sounding out of touch with reality, and this gives credence to the "liar, liar" refrain uttered by its critics. Those who defend the administration by pointing out that Clinton as well as Britain and Germany had made a similar assessment of Saddam's capabilities have a better case.

The only way to make sense of a huge flood of discrete facts like those coming into the CIA and other agencies is to approach them with a framework by which to interpret them. It is only a step from a framework to a theory (such as that offered by the so-called neocons) and then another step to "spin". One need not be a liar to construe facts mistakenly, especially when one is driven by the imperative to "do something" decisive against a complex enemy that is as much an attitude and ideology – that is, something in the realm of principalities and powers – as it is a specific enemy who can be destroyed with bullets.

David Frum

The situation is further complicated by the fact that in the realm of principalities and powers, the enemy is not just among us and opposite us but also within us. The delusion stated in the title of David Frum's book *An End to Evil: How to win the war on terror*, namely, that we can eliminate evil if only we have a good plan and enough power at our command is a delusion exposed by Christmas.

Even our best efforts – ours as well as Bush's – are profoundly contaminated by the error and violence in our own hearts so that they always give rise to new problems, new conflict. Even the noblest persons and the most advanced nations cannot get it right. So we look ever and again to the coming of the Lord in righteousness to judge the nations and bring peace.

Till then, we celebrate our Christmases amid the ruins of our own ineffectual attempts to administer justice and bring peace, for even in the stumbling efforts of the Bush administration and of our own government we see the desire for the "peace on earth" announced by the angels two thousand years ago in Bethlehem.

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Editorial

"The light shines in the darkness...."

Harry der Nederlanden

The message of "peace on earth" is forever and spectacularly associated with Christmas as the message proclaimed by the angels to the shepherds guarding their flocks not far from Bethlehem. Yet, thereafter, the theme of peace does not figure very prominently in the Gospels.

In fact, when Jesus is teaching his disciples to discern the signs of the times, he asks, "Do you think I came to bring peace on earth?" He answers, "No, I tell you, but division."

But when he returns to his disciples after his resurrection, he greets them with: "Peace be with you!" And Paul often uses the phrase "the God of peace" and his letters to the churches invariably open with the familiar greeting: "Grace and peace to you…."

The theme of peace is associated closely in Paul's mind with God's very nature. Through union with Christ we share in that nature and in that peace. By removing that which alienates us from God, Jesus Christ has given us peace with God and now calls us to live in peace with one another.

We think of peace as the absence of conflict. A peaceful person is one who is not quarrelsome but is adept at keeping good relations with everyone. When Paul tells us we should live in peace with others as much as we are able, what comes to mind are certain social virtues that Paul names – gentleness, kindness, mercy, self-control and slowness to anger. Peace becomes closely associated with love, with concern for others. By being kind and considerate, we avoid tensions and anger and lead lives of balance and serenity.

On the level of peoples and nations, we similarly define peace as the absence of war. Switzerland is known to be a peaceful country because it has managed to avoid military conflict with its neighbors, mainly by maintaining neutrality. But neutral countries haven't always avoided war. The Netherlands maintained its neutrality during the First World War, but had no choice about being involved in the Second World War.

When we look about us and examine our lives, we ask what has become of this proclamation of peace at the birth of our Savior? In view of the continuing quarrels and conflicts among Christians on a personal level and in view of the unceasing wars among tribes, peoples and nations, how can we take this literally? Must we take this announcement of the arrival of peace on a purely religious level? Isn't it actually about being reconciled with God so that deep within our hearts we may be assured that God has forgiven us and loves us?

Paul certainly begins here: peace is first of all the peace with God bought for us in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. There is even the element of our being reconciled within ourselves – with our own human nature – by virtue of the fact that in Christ our humanity was conjoined with the divine. The incarnation, God become flesh, is an affirmation and celebration of what we are – fleshly, earthly creatures.

But to stress this inner and spiritual peace at the expense of outer peace runs the danger of withdrawal, of distancing ourselves from involvement in the turbulent world of society, economics and politics. Or when we find it impossible to withdraw from those realms of clashing wills and perpetual conflict, we compromise: we tell ourselves that the inner realm is more real, more fundamental than the external, public world. Although our lives may be filled with turmoil on the outside, we are at peace within.

That sort of strategy cannot be entirely ruled out. Just as Paul can declare that even when he is in prison, he is free in Christ, so someone whose life is torn by all sorts of conflict can still discover an island of peace deep within through faith in Christ Jesus. We must not disparage that sort of interiority; it is precious.

In fact, we may ask ourselves whether someone who has not discovered that sort of inner peace but who is instead furiously working to find peace on one or more of these other levels may not be laboring in vain. He is like someone who tries to make his house more secure by putting too many layers of rooftiles on his roof. Eventually the joists can no longer bear the load, and the roof collapses.

Paul, of course, usually does not play off the inner against the outer (though, sometimes he does). He expects our peace with God to spill over and result in peace with our fellow believers and even with those outside the community of saints. He doesn't only expect it, he commands it in the name of Jesus Christ, for this is how we image the One whose name we bear.

He doesn't leave peace as a metaphysical description of the new human condition after we have been reunited with the Source of all peace – the God of peace. Nor does he leave it as a description of our spiritual state – a kind of inner equilibrium within ourselves. Nor does he stop at commending the social virtues that lubricate our relationships with others. He goes on to prescribe structures and mechanisms that the community of believers need to set up to enable them to settle differences and conflicts that will come up. In other words, he expects the making of peace even within the community of faith to be a never-ending struggle.

The great prophet Isaiah, who was allowed to foresee so much, called the Messiah the Prince of Peace and he declares that "of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end."

He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever. (Isa. 9:7)

It is a promise designed to make our hearts beat faster, to stir up our deepest desires and longings, to dream the big dreams of righteousness, justice, love and peace.

See, a king will reign in righteousness
and rulers will rule with justice.
Each man will be like a shelter from the wind
and a refuge from the storm,
like stream of water in the desert
and the shadow of a great rock in a thirsty land.
Then the eyes of those who see will no longer be closed,
and the ears of those who hear will listen. (Isa. 32:1-3)

Isaiah reverberates with such visionary promises. Really, to get some of the impact of that angel chorus over Bethlehem, we must reread those glorious passages in the Old Testament, for what the angels declare is the fulfilment of those promises.

A favorite chapter at Christmas is Isaiah 60, the one that begins:

Arise, shine, for your
light has come,
and the glory of the Lord
rises upon you.

Truly, that is more exciting than a thousand candles and ten thousand blazing Christmas trees!

But, look, in that very chapter, which envisions all the sons and daughters of Israel coming from afar in a great Christmas homecoming, there are also images of conquest and war. Kings from foreign lands are led into the city of God in a triumphal procession, bringing their wealth to Israel. And Isaiah declares: "The sons of your oppressors will come bowing before you."

Visions of peace still mingle here with visions of conquest.

That is true in Bethlehem as well. The story of the babe in the manger is related as the story of a great contradiction. It radically undercuts not just the peace of Rome and Herod, but also the peace proffered from Jerusalem, from the scribes and pharisees. The incarnation is itself an invasion, an act of violence. Listen to the song of Mary:

He has performed might deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones....

The warrior God of the Old testament does not vanish in the baby Jesus. His coming in the flesh is part of the conflict of the ages as envisioned by John on Patmos when he sees the dragon pursuing the woman who has given birth to the male child. (Rev. 12:13)

I've been reading two masterful books on war: Donald Kagan's *On the Origins of War* and Philip Bobbit's *The Shield of Achilles*. Looking back in modern history, Kagan observes that in the past we have placed our hopes for a lasting peace on a free market economy that makes us dependent on one another, on the spread of democracy because, it is said, democratic nations do not wage war on one another, on a balance of power, and on the mutual assured destruction of nuclear weapons. Bobbit's overview of some 500 years of Western history seeks to show that we have passed through several phases: in each phase governments have based their claims to legitimacy and different notions of law and order, and each phase is characterized by a different kind of warfare. Nation-building and the establishment of law, justice and peace are always worked out in human affairs with great violence. That is part of the human condition.

History tells us that all our gargantuan efforts to assure peace for ourselves and overcome the conditions of war have only bred new wars. But Christmas is the great contradiction: it is God's announcement that he has come and is coming to root out all that violence from history – by taking it upon himself. And because of the birth of the God-man in Bethlehem, the church has a message for a world steeped in darkness, violence and war:

The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.

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Anniversary

Our 60th Christmas – darkness and light, despair and new hope

In the early years – the forties mainly – neither *The Canadian Calvinist* nor *Contact* made much of the Christmas season. A meditation of some 200-300 words sufficed. Of course, space limitations played a role, but there seems also to be a reluctance to inflate the holiday overly much.

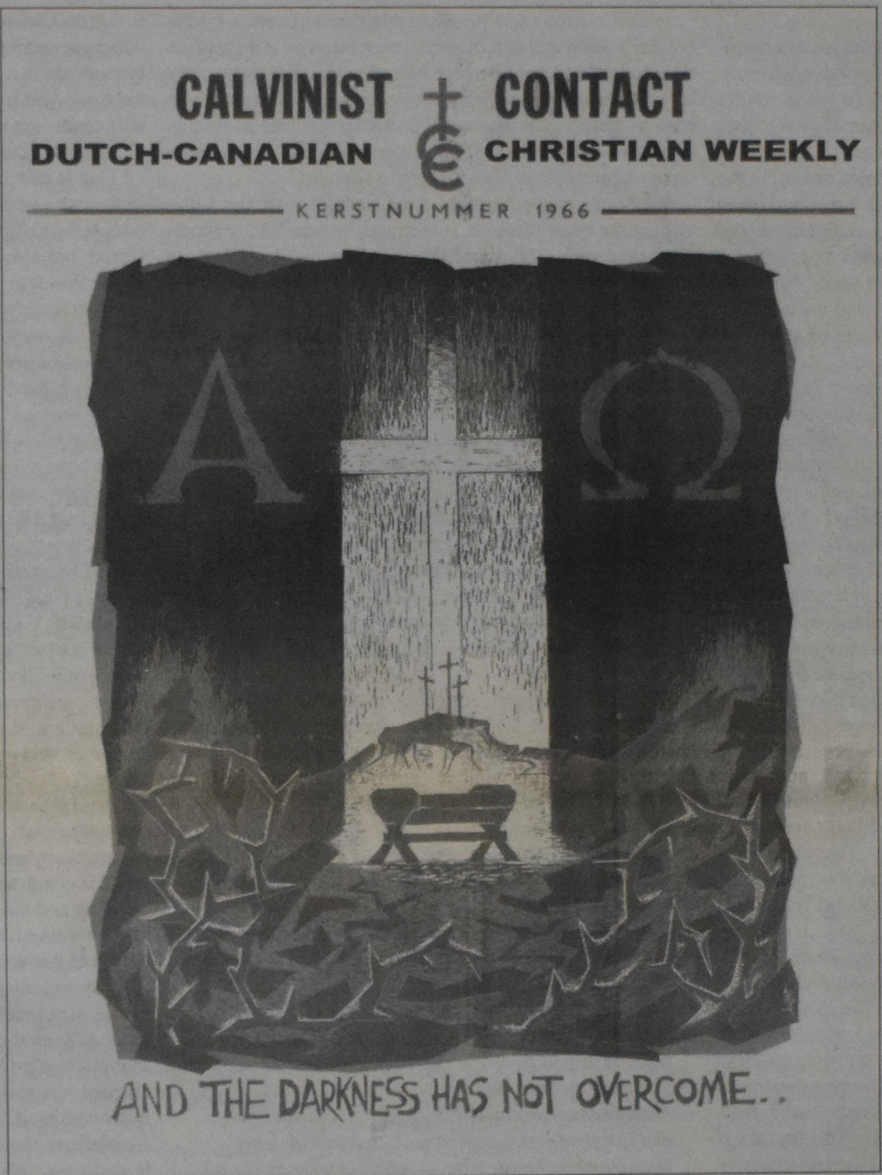
The first substantial celebration of Christmas in *CC* was in 1951. That year's issue closest to Christmas carried three pieces with Christmas as the theme: the editorial (which urged the immigrants to ban Santa Claus from their celebrations); a short story in which the main character Harm wanders off into the woods on Christmas eve and sees the heavens open to him (Yes, he freezes to death); and an article by J.K. van Baalen that warns against spiritualizing "peace on earth" so that it refers only to an inner peace. Appearances to the contrary, insists Van Baalen, the message of peace at Christmas is also about peace among nations.

Although I by no means read every piece of Christmas fiction in every Christmas issue back to the beginning, I did scan quite a few. You'd be surprised at how many of the story writers find it strategic to kill off the main character around Christmas. Calvinist fiction writers were not about to sweeten reality to create warm, sentimental feelings relative to Christmas. Even Arie Dof participated in the slaughter of the innocents: he finished off Maggie MacManus just before Christmas – but she died with a Bible in her hands reading St. Luke.

Take one late fifties Christmas issue: it contains three short stories, in two of them the main character dies and in the third a young immigrant mother looking forward to Christmas learns that her husband has been badly injured in an automobile accident and will be hospitalized for several weeks. But her hardship enables her to share her comfort with a neighbor whose grief has caused him to reject the Christmas story.

Calvinists were always realists. They knew Christmas was about life and death, that it was about life entering into death. Perhaps they also sensed that the beauty and sentiment of Christmas shone brighter against a dark background. That would make it an aesthetic rather than religious move. Maybe they all had a little bit of Rembrandt in their bones. With him, too, vision has to be extricated from a dark background.

But the Christmas issue of 1955 is a truly special Christmas issue with most articles devoted to the season, plus three Christmas poems. Also part of the issue is a long list of names of people sending Christmas greetings from Holland to Canada – on one side the name of some person in the Netherlands and on the other of some friend or relative in Canada, plus their city or town. The list covers more than a page and is continued in the next issue for another page. John vander Vliet, secretary of the publications committee, had recently made a visit to the old country and returned with his pockets bulging with greetings. This was the way *CC* decided to pass them on.



Cover for the 1966 issue by John Knight

The greetings are arranged geographically and every major city and town where Dutch immigrants settled is represented, including some place names I've never heard: Murillo, Campbellford, Brittania Bay, Wooler, Grassies, Survey Bridgeview, Mimico, Dondesborough, and even a couple to Camp Petawawa and the Military Barracks in Calgary.

People reaching out across vast distances and time to connect at Christmas. Loneliness, yes, longings, yes, but also comfort, hope, the good news.

I wish I could publish the entire list, but there are well over 200 entries and locations from B.C. to the Maritimes.

Paging through the Christmas issues of the fifties, you notice large travel bureau ads featuring a large ship and Sinterklaas. "Spend Sinterklaas and Christmas with your family in The Netherlands," urge the ads. "The modern Maasdam leaves Halifax for Rotterdam November 22. Tourist class $177.00; first class $240."

How many paused over them, seized with homesickness – but how many could afford to make the trip? It's hard not to become sentimental. Hear the strains of "I'll be home for Christmas" in the background?

By 1957, we have the familiar look of the special Christmas issue of *CC* with a touch of color, greetings from advertisers and various organizations – from Voortman's, Guardian Publishing, Koops Travel Service, De Boer's Appliances and Furniture, Jan Kok Imports, the CRC Co-operative Merdical [sic] and Hospital Society and so on.

An article inside tells us that there have been four centuries of Christmas celebrations in Canada. The first celebrations took place in 1535 in a fort erected by Jacques Cartier at the mouth of the St. Charles River. Their ships frozen in the ice, the explorers were surrounded by natives they could not trust. Two dozen died before spring.

In 1964 *CC* marked the Advent season, featuring a special meditation on the front page of each of the four issues before Christmas. Each was illustrated with a black-and-white woodcut by Christoffel Overvoorde.

For many years the Christmas issue carried stories by Ineke Parlevliet, Tini van Ameyde and Arie Dof. Tini also composed a surprising number of Christmas poems in the Dutch. In the late sixties the front page was brightened by artwork done especially for *CC* by John Knight, some adding a single color – bright red. In the seventies, however, *CC* reverted to black and white.

The late sixties was the era that brought us "Out of Concern for the Church" and fittingly one of the Christmas issues carries a modest proposal by Hendrik Hart to skip Christmas altogether, because it has been debased to a consumer carnival. Cor Bare'ndrecht suggested that we observe three minutes of silence on Christmas day as a way to recall the true meaning of the holiday.

In 1974 Remkes Kooistra provided a Christmas litany that began: "O Lord, forgive us our Christmases as we forgive those who Christmas against us."

While earlier Dutch immigrants were put off by the exchange of presents at Christmas because they were accustomed to keep Sinterklaas and Christmas separate, a second generation had more philosophical reasons, but they arose from a similar uneasiness at how easy it is to let Christmas become something very, very different from a celebration of God's coming in the flesh.

In a later issue, Kooistra pleads,

Please don't make your Christmas too small.

Do not celebrate only a feeling or just inner peace.

Celebrate the presence of God; yes, even in our war-torn world.

Celebrate the presence of God in Jesus Christ his Son, which means forgiveness and covenant partnership.

Have a festival dinner. Celebrate! Join the angels in celebrating facts, real happenings – history.

And he concludes:

Peace on earth is by no means a lost cause,
for it is the cause of the Child born in Bethlehem –
our Lord Jesus Christ.

The dead who teach us

Eternal Student
Peter Schuurman

I recently visited Gunther von Hagens' controversial Body Worlds exhibit, the anatomical exhibition of real human bodies at the Ontario Science Center. It is definitely a down to earth experience, for even the advertisements say "kicks glueteus maximus." If you can afford the $25 adult admission fee, and don't mind crowds (or cadavers), it would be a memorable educational experience. For the dead have much to teach us.

This contentious exhibit features over 200 plasticized human bodies – call them extremely well preserved cadavers without the skin. They have been placed in all kinds of different positions, highlighting different muscles, nerve endings, genitals and organs as well as the diseases that afflict them. Poses include a skier, skateboarder, soccer player, javelin thrower, pole vaulter, and ballet dancer. Special features include a plasticized smoker's lung, corrupted arteries, tumored organs, a camel, and a reconstruction of a rooster by only its blood vessels.

Two exhibits stuck out for me. One was a series of cross sections of an obese person's body juxtaposed beside an average sized body. The extra mass surrounding the body was both striking and disgusting. As a whole, the exhibit encourages visitors to consider what their lifestyle does to their body.

Secondly, they had a plasticized pregnant woman with the baby still in her womb. Around this exhibit, they had embryos one to eight weeks old and fetuses from 19-30 weeks old. Mysteriously, at this part of the exhibit there were no fetuses displayed for the period in-between, weeks 9-18. I wonder if the politics of abortion played a role in this omission.

Invasive beauty

The overwhelming feeling as you gaze at these inner parts of yourself is wonder and awe. As you walk into the exhibit you are greeted by a large banner with the words of Psalm 8: "What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet."

There is a terrible beauty to these frozen human bodies. It is startling, arresting, and I even got a little queasy recognizing that under my skin I was little different from these exhibits. One woman turned to me in front of one of the bodies and said, "it feels a little weird, doesn't it. Like you're invading their privacy or something." You wonder who these people were, and if a little biographical sketch beside each body would have honored them more deeply.

There was a presentation explaining how donors "declared during their lifetime that their bodies should be made available after their deaths for the qualification of physicians and the instruction of laypersons." They even show the actual form of consent which begins with these lines: "I hereby wish and intend that my body will be made available for plastination after my death. I give my consent by signing this document. I do not wish to be buried.... I would like my body to be transferred to the Institute for Plastination."

Profoundly beautiful

The owner of the exhibit, Gunther von Hagens, says "Plastination unveils the beauty beneath the skin, frozen in time between death and decay." He quotes Goethe, who said "Anatomical dissection gives the human mind an opportunity to compare the dead with the living, things severed with things intact, things destroyed with things of evolving, and opens up the profoundness of nature to us more than any other endeavor or consideration."

I glanced through the book for comments at the end of the exhibit. Most people scribbled words of appreciation and wonder. There were those who debated as to whether this was art, science, or just a mindless voyeurism. Some complained that most of the cadavers seemed Caucasian and that the genders were stereotyped: males playing soccer and skateboarding, while the females were doing ballet and yoga. "Why didn't you have any that were playing musical instruments?" asked one visitor. Others questioned the suitability of the exhibit for children and expressed concern that some viewers may irreverently miss the profoundness, the beauty, and almost sacredness of the exhibit. Some confessed a need to exercise more, having been given an opportunity to contemplate not only their health, but their mortality. Finally, some were just relieved that it was over: "I made it through without passing out!"

As you leave, another bannered quote closes the exhibit, this time from St. Augustine: "The arrangement of the body is so well proportioned, the symmetry of its parts so beautiful that it can be doubted whether at its creation utility was more of a determining factor than beauty." At this time of year, we celebrate the incarnation of God into a human body – the most profound affirmation of God's love for bodies and earthiness. You might just make this an advent excursion.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario

Welcoming the stranger

On Friday, November 18, Citizens for Public Justice launched an initiative aimed to embrace those who come to Canada. It is called Welcome the Stranger: Becoming Neighbours, an initiative appropriate to the Christmas season.

CPJ Executive Director Harry Kits explained: "Refugees can be politically expedient. They are embraced when they make a good news story, like air-lifting Albanians during the Kosovo crisis. And they are a source of suspicion when security concerns are at the fore. It is time to create a consistently warm climate for those in need of Canada's protection, who just want to get on with their lives."

The first action is a petition to be sent to the government. Copies of the petition are available on the CPJ website: http://www.cpj.ca/refugees/Welcome_the_Stranger/

The second action is the signing of a personal pledge.

PETITION to the House of Commons

WHEREAS:

Canada has been a land of hope for newcomers and particularly refugees, and Canadians are proud of our multicultural society;

Canada has an international reputation of commitment to protecting human rights and is a signatory to numerous international treaties on refugees and human rights, including the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the Convention against Torture, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;

Millions of people around the globe are refugees fleeing war, persecution, torture and other forms of violence, the vast majority of whom are hosted by poor nations. Canada accepts just a tiny percentage of the world's refugees, and refugees are less than one-tenth of our total immigration;

Canada risks losing our heritage of welcome. In a climate of fear, Canada has enacted policies to counter the fear of terrorism and the fear for national security. Some of these policies harm those people seeking protection, causing them to be perceived as threats;

We, the undersigned, do pledge to:

a. Do our part to become neighbours, to overcome fear, to live in hope, to make Canada a warm and welcoming place for refugees and other newcomers in our communities, our workplaces, our schools, our places of worship and in all our walks of life;

b. Encourage civic, provincial and federal leaders to enact policies that make Canada a place of welcome and of refuge;

THEREFORE, we call upon Parliament to

a) "welcome the stranger" in need and significantly increase the number of refugees that Canada accepts annually;

b) lift barriers that prevent refugees from reaching Canada;

c) provide international leadership to address the causes that force people from their homes and prevent them from returning;

d) reform Canada's refugee and immigration program to ensure full access to due process and fundamental justice;

e) speed the immigration process for reuniting refugees and their families; and

f) take further measures to help newcomers integrate into Canadian society.

Vatican unity head tells World Council of Churches divisions loom

Stephen Brown

Geneva (ENI) – The Vatican's top official for church unity has called to a stepping up of theological talks for unity against a background of rifts on issues such as sexual ethics which he suggested are setting back the cause of Christian union.

"The Catholic Church sees and rejoices in the progress made in the ecumenical pilgrimage in the last century," said Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. Speaking on November 17 at the Geneva headquarters of the World Council of Churches, he warned, however, of an "ecumenical crisis" because a "fully common vision" is lacking.

"The ecumenical movement in the 21st century needs clarity, sometimes new clarity on its theological foundations," urged the Vatican official at a commemoration to mark the 40th anniversary of the setting up of the joint working group of the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC. "Otherwise it will be like a house built on sand, which falls down when the storm comes."

The Roman Catholic Church does not belong to the WCC, whose 347 members are from mainly Protestant and Christian Orthodox traditions, but it cooperates with the Geneva-based grouping on numerous issues and serves on some of its bodies.

"Without danger of betraying our faith or our conscience we could already today do much more together than we actually do," said Kasper, pointing to common Bible study, joint worship services, as well as co-operation in theology, mission and development work, and links between spiritual ecumenical movements.

However, differences on ethical issues, "especially in relation to sexual behavior," are leading to new rifts. "In the past there was a large consensus in these questions; now previously unknown new differences have arisen," Kasper noted. Such issues, he said, had "an enormous emotional and therefore ... also an enormous divisive power."

Kasper fully agreed with the conclusion of WCC leaders that there must be mutual recognition of the sacrament of baptism among the members of the WCC and the Catholic Church. He paid tribute to the WCC's Faith and Order Commission which promotes dialogue to help resolve doctrinal differences between churches, and which has Catholics as full members. In particular, he highlighted a study on "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" by the commission which the cardinal told journalists before giving his speech, "is the most important document the WCC has achieved in all its years."

In his address, Kasper suggested that work on such issues needed to have a higher priority in the future. "We ask therefore the WCC to give back to 'Faith and Order' the momentum it originally had," said Kasper, who is, like Pope Benedict XVI, a former member of the commission. "Partners cannot have a shared vision of the goal without common theological ground on the meaning of the Church and her unity," he warned.

Pope Benedict after his election in April said his "primary task" would be to promote the unity of all Christians. And, in talks in June with WCC general secretary the Rev. Samuel Kobia, the Pope spoke of the "irreversible commitment" of the Catholic Church to the search for Christian unity.

Still, Kasper suggested in Geneva it would be easier for the Catholic Church to reach agreement with Orthodox churches than with the Protestant denominations that emerged after the 16th century Reformation in Europe.

He said, "The Catholic understanding of unity, understood as full communion in faith, sacraments and Church ministry, corresponds in principle with the understanding of our Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox sister churches, but unfortunately differs from the most usual interpretation of the mainline Protestant position."

Queen Elizabeth extols Christian role at time of rapid change

Martin Revis

London (ENI) – Queen Elizabeth II extolled the unique role of the Christian Church in the search for meaning in the modern world when she opened the (Anglican) Church of England's general synod in London.

The 79-year-old monarch, speaking in her role as the Church of England's supreme governor, gave a robust reaffirmation of her faith to some 450 bishops, clergy and laity attending the two-day session of the denomination's parliament, in its first meeting of a five-year term.

"When so much is in flux, when limitless amounts of information, much of it ephemeral are instantly accessible, there is renewed hunger for that which endures and gives meaning," Queen Elizabeth stated at the opening of the synod on November 15. "The Christian church can speak uniquely to that need, for at the heart of our faith stands the conviction that all people, irrespective of race, background or circumstance, can find lasting significance and purpose in the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Her avowal of faith followed the recent release of an al-Qaida video in which Osama bin Laden's second in command, Ayman al-Zawahiri, described the British sovereign as one of the severest enemies of Islam responsible for Britain's "crusader laws". He also threatened British Muslims who "worked for the pleasure of Elizabeth, the head of the Church of England."

Referring to deepening relations between Christian churches in Britain, the Queen spoke of her pleasure at the signing of a Methodist and Church of England covenant in 2003 and the choice of a Methodist preacher, theology professor Frances Young, for the synod's opening service.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, in his presidential address on November 16 , referred to "quarrels over sexuality" in the worldwide Anglican Communion of which he is the spiritual leader.

"The sexuality debate is infinitely complicated by high levels of mutual ignorance and anxiety between 'North' and 'South', and by perceptions, not always unfair, about the uncritical use of power and influence by older and wealthier churches," Williams noted.

Resolving the dispute might be helped if synod members made a commitment to contact someone from an Anglican church in another part of the world who was unlikely to share their view, he suggested.

Anglican churches in developing countries have often been at loggerheads with their counterparts in the North over the issue of homosexuality.

See related story on bottom of page 10.

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II chats with Archbishop of York John Sentamu following the Communion Service

Shooting and machete attacks stun Christians in Indonesia

Sarah Page

DUBLIN (Compass) – Indonesian Christians are in shock today as details emerge of two vicious attacks over the weekend on a Christian couple and three teenagers in the town of Palu, Central Sulawesi.

Motorbike riders shot a man and woman at close range shortly after they left a church service on Saturday, November 19. Palu is near the town of Poso, where machete and shooting attacks have killed four teenage girls and seriously injured two others in the past month.

The victims of Saturday's shooting were identified as Novlin Pallinggi, 37, and her husband Pudji Laksono, 45. A bullet was removed from Laksono's chest on Sunday, and he is in stable condition. But surgeons failed to dislodge two bullets from Pallinggi's chest and ribs, and she remains in critical condition, The Jakarta Post reported.

Witnesses said two men fired at the couple.

On November 8 in the nearby town of Poso, two female students, Ivon Maganti, 17, and Siti Nuraini, 17, were shot while they sat chatting in front of a house in a Christian area of Poso. Siti, a Muslim, died shortly afterward, while Ivon, a Christian, is still recovering.

A week earlier on October 29, machete-wielding assailants also beheaded three Christian schoolgirls in Poso as they walked to school – Theresia Morangke, 15, Alfita Poliwo, 17, and Yarni Sambue, 15. A fourth victim, 15-year-old Noviana Malewa, is still being treated for serious machete wounds to her face and neck.

Christians in the town of Palu were also concerned about an attack on Friday morning, November 18, in which two women and one man were attacked with machetes, killing one of the women. Officials have, however, refused to comment on the religious affiliation of the three victims.

As in many previous incidents, the attacks were carried out by men on motorcycles.

A spokesman for the Central Sulawesi police force refused to speculate on links between these incidents and previous attacks

National Police spokesman Brig. Gen. Soenarko said on Friday that police had arrested a man named Irfan Masiro in relation to the beheadings. Masiro is a security guard at Poso Hospital.

"We have named Irfan a suspect because ... he owned a machete with a bloodstain that matches [Morangke's] blood type," Soenarko said.

Irfan is one of five suspects previously questioned by the military; the other four were released last week due to lack of evidence.

Soenarko also said police had arrested four suspects in the November 8 shooting of Maganti and Nuraini. Residents of Poso and Palu remained skeptical however, citing numerous violent crimes in 2004 and 2005 that remain unsolved. In most cases, the victims were Christians.

From 2000 to 2001, violent conflict between Muslims and Christians on the island of Sulawesi resulted in at least 1,000 deaths. A similar conflict took place in the neighboring Maluku islands from 1998 to 2002.

Vietnamese churches boldly standing up to abuses

HANOI, Vietnam (Compass) – For years Vietnamese church leaders have filed complaints of religious liberty abuses to government officials and have almost never received replies. But in an unprecedented shift, pastors are now petitioning authorities more openly and internationally.

Father Ly

In a country that sentenced Father Nguyen Van Ly to 15 years in prison for writing to a U.S. government agency about religious rights violations, leaders of one of Vietnam's recognized churches are openly copying their petitions against such abuses not only to U.S. and European Union officials, but to foreign media organizations. (Sentenced in October 2001, Father Ly was released as part of a general amnesty last February 1.)

Since October 5, the Rev. Phung Quang Huyen and the Rev. Au Quang Vinh, president and general secretary respectively of the Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North), have sent copies to foreign governments and media of petitions they have written on behalf of persecuted Hmong Christians.

Rev. Huyen, for example, wrote a petition on November 8 to authorities on government attempts to force seven Hmong families to give up their faith. He addressed it to Vietnam's prime minister and half a dozen other top government agencies, and openly copied it to the European Union office and U.S. Embassy in Hanoi, as well as to international news agencies.

The letter relates Hmong Christian Trang Seo Dinh's description of how people were continually summoned to the police station, harangued and beaten for refusing to give up their Christian belief.

"The Evangelical Church of Vietnam (North) strongly condemns the human rights violations described above," wrote Rev. Huyen. "We petition the Prime Minister, the Government Bureau of Religious Affairs, and the Police of Lao Cai Province to investigate this case and punish any individual or group that violated the constitution and the law."

While thousands of such petitions have been sent to local and central government officials in recent years and some of them have been published outside Vietnam, this marks the first time church officials have openly, simultaneously distributed such letters so broadly. Father Ly was punished severely for such tactics while in prison, but at press time authorities had taken no action against Rev. Huyen.

Other church leaders have taken the challenge of refuting their government's widely broadcast denials and fabrications regarding religious freedom, as they too have decided to go international. Further raising the stakes, church leaders show they have acquired legal savvy as their petitions cite articles of the criminal code in naming officials who abuse Christians.

At least in part, the new-found courage stems from growing frustration with the Vietnamese government, which continues to deny credible reports of serious religious liberty abuses while proclaiming complete religious freedom.

The ECVN (N) has in the last two years issued letters accepting into membership 981 mostly Hmong, ethnic minority churches in the northwest provinces. Not only has the government refused to accept these churches as legitimate, but it continues a brutal campaign to eradicate Christianity among Hmong Christians, according to a recent Freedom House release. Such activity directly contradicts Vietnam's recent legislation on religion.

On November 8, the U.S. Department of State named Vietnam for a second time to its list of worst religious liberty offenders in the world, called "countries of particular concern." On October 29, Agence-Presse France reported that Vietnam had demanded the U.S. remove it from the black list.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Le Dung told a news conference in Hanoi, "There is no so-called religious repression of any religion in Vietnam." Likewise, on November 11 the Vietnam News Agency reacted angrily to the continued inclusion of Vietnam on the list, calling the action "a violation of the U.N. Charter and causing damage to Vietnam-U.S. relations."

The Vietnamese blamed "distortion campaigns launched by hostile forces against Vietnam."

In announcing the CPC list, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice did recognize that Vietnam had made improvements. If those improvements continued, she said, Vietnam could be removed from the list.

Compass sources in Vietnam noted that Vietnam's new religion legislation has not yet yielded the "improvements" the United States and others have hoped for. "As long as a huge segment of the church, such as a quarter million Hmong believers, are subject to a specifically anti-Christian government campaign," said one source, "it is hard to accept that real 'improvements' have been made."

Religious rights in Vietnam

Alison L. Boden

I recently returned from a trip to Vietnam with a group of University of Chicago faculty and students to study first-hand the state of human rights there. Concerning religious rights and freedoms, our conversations with representatives from the government's Department of Religion in Hanoi and with several religious communities were illuminating, as was a meeting with researchers at the Vietnamese Institute for Human Rights at the Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy. Both the U.S. Department of State and the non-governmental organization Human Rights Watch have strongly criticized the Vietnamese government's policies toward – and participation in – the internal workings of that country's religious communities. My visit convinced me that their concerns are indeed warranted.

Broadly, these concerns are as follows: that the Vietnamese government (specifically, the Department of Religion) reserves the right to authorize which religious communities may exist in the country; that the government effectively chooses and then trains leaders for each religious community; that the communities that criticize the government, or whose teachings or practices are thought to undermine government control, are censored, restricted, or closed; that ethnic-minority Christians are being forced to recant their faith; and that the evangelical Protestant Montagnards of the Central Highlands border with Cambodia are being denied the freedom to assemble, are subjected to physical abuse, and are fleeing into Cambodia.

Our conversation at the Department of Religion revolved around the Ordinance on Belief and Religion, ratified by the government last year. As its introduction states, "its promulgation aims at protecting the right of all citizens to freedom of belief and religion while improving the effectiveness and efficiency of State governance over religious activities."

Our dialogue on the text revealed significant differences between American and Vietnamese ideas of how governments adequately promote religious freedom. The self-understanding in the United States is that government best protects religious freedom by leaving people alone to practice their faith, intervening only in cases where the law is broken or human well-being is in danger.

The Vietnamese government says the same of itself, but also intervenes in groups' daily affairs to ensure that all religious activity meets its own criteria for "morality" and "order." At the Human Rights Center, one researcher challenged what he views as American negligence in the matter. Referring to group suicides by religious communities, he suggested that the American government fails to ensure religious freedom because it allows citizens to do whatever they want in the name of religious belief and practice. Certainly the American government must recognize its responsibility to enforce certain moral guidelines in religious communities for the safety of the public? Tragedy may strike if it doesn't.

The Department of Religion scheduled formal visits for us to two religious communities, both in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon). The first was the recently sanctioned Evangelical Church of Vietnam, a denomination that, according to Human Rights Watch, the government is trying to coerce other Protestant groups, especially Mennonites, to affiliate with. The leaders with whom we met were women who lamented the sexism in their church that prevents their ordination (they currently serve only as licensed preachers).

They stated that their biggest challenge is the inability to provide biblical and theolo-gical education to create future leaders of the church. Foreigners are forbidden to teach in such academies, while the funds to study abroad are usually beyond the means of Vietnamese citizens. They testified also to government restrictions that, they feel, are significantly slowing their growth, such as a prohibition on missionary activity and roadblocks on acquiring property for church buildings.

When asked about ecumenical cooperation with Catholics, their responses suggested that there is none. When asked about relationships with international Christian organizations such as the World Council of Churches, they drew a complete blank. Nationally and internationally they would seem to be quite isolated.

Meanwhile, our visit to the largest Buddhist pagoda in Ho Chi Minh City was aesthetically wonderful but politically without substance. Our venerable hosts gently declined every invitation to speak about relations with the government.

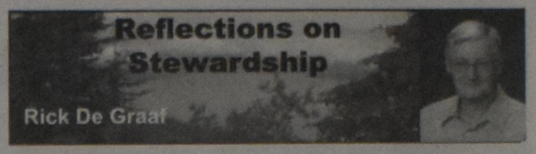
I was left with the impression that the Vietnamese government strives to neutralize the organizing potential of these religious communities. The potential for mass movements of reformers who are fueled by divine imperatives is not a welcome thought to the government, which is therefore doing its best to ensure that the contents of people's religious faiths and observances are under its control.

Our delegation concluded that the model of religious freedom in the United States – notwithstanding threats of violence or illegal behavior by religious groups – is preferable to one in which the state domesticates faith and practices to support its own political objectives.

Alison Boden is Dean of Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, Senior Lecturer in the Divinity School and the College, and co-chair of the board of the Human Rights Program at the University of Chicago.

This article first appeared on Sightings, a website of the Martin Marty Center at the University of Chicago Divinity School.

Charitable gift annuities



Many Canadians put considerable thought into preparing for retirement. They accumulate financial resources in pension plans, RRSPs, business assets and other types of savings. They hope to build a secure retirement income. Some years ago the financial markets looked like they were providing the answer; however, in recent years market downturns have been less kind to those preparing for retirement.

For most a large lump sum of money is less important than knowing that they will have an income adequate to their needs that they cannot outlive. One old timer told me he would rather know that he had a slice of bread each day than a loaf of bread all at once.

In this column, two issues back, we raised the question "When is enough, enough?" The answer to this question is different for each one of us.

Henry Eygenraam, the Executive Director of CSS, says "In the low interest environment of the past several years many seniors are looking for a way to fix their fixed income. On the other side of the coin most ministries and charities are eager for additional income." This is a situation where the Charitable Gift Annuity may be a win-win for both!

What is a Charitable Gift Annuity (CGA)?

It is a plan that combines a gift to charity with an agreement whereby the charity provides you with a guaranteed regular income for as long as you live (or you and your spouse). The income is based on your age and rates offered at the time the annuity commences. The payments may be made monthly, quarterly, semi-annually, or annually. The amount you deposit is invested by the charity and it makes payments to you which are a blend of principle and interest. The payments will continue for as long as you (and/or your spouse) live. The remainder in the fund is given to charity upon your death.

Since the rate of income is partly based on age, the CGA is most suitable for persons aged 65 or older. The CGA "Giving Plan" allows you to give a substantial gift which produces a charitable tax receipt and an income to you. In fact, when the tax advantages are considered, you may find that the income is higher through a gift annuity.

It is a gift … that happens to provide you a regular flow of level payments, unaffected by the economy or varying interest rates. An income that you can't outlive!

- When you set up a Charitable Gift Annuity, you will qualify for a one-time charitable donation receipt for a portion of the initial amount.
- A large portion of the income you receive is tax exempt. This increases your net income.
- The amount ultimately forwarded to the charity is not subject to probate fees.
- It is an income stream that requires no knowledge of managing the investment
- In combination with other investments it creates balance and safety

These benefits may be yours by signing up for a CGA.

In a recent CSS Newsletter (available by request) Henry Eygenraam lists a number of alternative ways in which CGA's can be used in the income and estate planning process:

· *Pay me now or pay me later:*

In some cases a bequest in a will can trigger a charitable donation tax receipt which could not be fully used. Perhaps the individual could use such a receipt during their lifetime more effectively. In this situation a CGA could provide such a timely donation receipt. Even if the income is not yet required by the donor, it could be assigned temporarily to the charity (providing much needed donor income) until a future date when the income is needed by the donor.

· *Directing a gift through a will and beyond to charity:*

Most people want to be certain to leave a gift of adequate income to loved ones through their estate plan. The concern here is that when the gift goes beyond this primary beneficiary it may not go to benefit the charities favored by the donor. It might instead be directed by the second person's will to completely different purposes. By using a CGA as one of the estate planning tools in a will, a gift of guaranteed income is realized and the direction of the residue to the ultimate charitable beneficiary is accomplished as well.

· *Combining a CGA with life insurance:*

Some people have said to us, "We would like to give our gifts with a warm hand, have an income we cannot outlive, and leave a reasonable amount to our children." We have been able to achieve these objectives through the careful use of a combination of these two planning vehicles.

· *A double benefit from converting appreciated securities into largely tax-free income:*

Most taxpayers have heard that appreciated publicly traded securities can be given "in kind" directly to charities thereby reducing the capital gain income tax liability by 50 percent. When combining this tax incentive with a conversion to a CGA (which has a very low tax liability on the income) it can result in a large charitable donation receipt which may offset taxable income from other sources.

The alternatives that Henry suggests are not applicable for everyone. Therefore, our best advice is to sit down with someone who knows about CGAs and other estate planning tools – someone who can explore the possibilities with you.

Call someone you can trust. Consider my colleagues – their time with you is covered by our funding partners (Christian charities) and together we are committed to help you be the best steward of the resources that God has entrusted to you. After all, your financial stewardship not only benefits you and your family but can also benefit the ministries of your favorite charities! For more details see the Christian Stewardship Services ad near the back of this issue of Christian Courier.

Stewardly tip:

Family Project. A reader from Emo Ontario shared this tip. Consider signing up for the regular cleanup of a section of a roadside near your home. It's a great family project (working together) and instills lasting environmental care and respect in your children. The trash and the disrespect by others facilitate important family conversations and demonstrate how to deal with those who don't seem to care. Check with your local municipality or regional office and stake your family project. Most municipalities collaborate and arrange for bulk pick up of collected trash.

Readers: Share your 'Stewardly Tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestion and your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask for more details.

Next issue: Treasure in Jars of Clay

Rick DeGraaf works for Christian Stewardship Services in Markham, Ontario Rick's email: rickd@csservices.ca

CHRISTIAN Stewardship SERVICES

Support from over 35 partner charities allows CSS to offer Will and Estate Planning from a Christian perspective **at no cost.** For more information contact us at:

1-800-267-8990 admin@csservices.ca

(CSS has representatives across Canada for your convenience)

Connecting Donors, Charities & Ministries

Anglican leader faces new row with bishops over homosexuality

Martin Revis

London (ENI) – Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, is facing a confrontation with nearly half of the leaders of the worldwide Anglican Communion who are up in arms over what they say is his stance on the issue of homosexual clergy.

A total of 17 of the 38 primates issued a letter sent to Williams on November 16 attacking his personal ability to lead the communion and demanding he take action against "unrepented sexual immorality" in the church.

The letter issued by Anglican leaders from a group called the "Global South" was published on web sites. Ten of the signatories represented African sections of the church and included the Nigerian archbishop, Peter Akinola. They said they were troubled over Williams's reluctance to use his moral authority as leader of the worldwide Anglican communion to challenge the ordination of homosexuals in the United States and Canada. They also said they were unhappy about a Church of England ruling giving acceptance to clergy who enter into legal same sex partnerships due to come into effect in December.

"We wonder, however, whether your personal dissent from this consensus prevents you from taking the necessary steps to confront those churches that have embraced teaching contrary to the overwhelming testimony of the Anglican Communion and the church catholic," the bishops stated in the letter posted on the Web site: http://www.globalsouthanglican.org/

"We urge you to rethink your personal view and embrace the Church's consensus and to act on it, based as it is on the clear witness of Scripture,"

A statement issued by a spokesperson for the archbishop after the letter had been received said: "The Archbishop of Canterbury has made it clear since before his enthronement that neither he nor anyone else has any mandate to change the church's teachings by fiat."

The spokesperson said Williams was committed to the process to which all the primates committed themselves and their provinces in response to the 2004 Windsor Report, regarding the issue.

Meditation

Those who have seen the child have seen the Father

H. van Andel
(Translated from the Dutch in the Christmas issue of 1965.)

Most people in the world like the idea of having a Father in heaven.

Every human being, after all, would like to have someone who looks after him and keeps him safe. Human life bristles with risks and dangers. It would be folly to carelessly cast aside a heavenly Father who prevents all those dangers and keeps us from harm. Yes, of course a broken, suffering humanity can use such a heavenly Father.

At bottom every single human being, whether rich or poor, longs for such a Father. But under one condition. Such a Father must make his presence felt. He must demonstrate that he is present. There should be evidences of his fatherly presence in human life.

Without that, what use is such a Father? If he remains silent, if he doesn't do anything, why believe in him? It would be foolish to trust in such a Father. We would be plagued with the question: "Is he really there?" Or we would come to the radical conclusion that there is no God.

This is the problem faced by many thousands of people, including Christians. They have no objections to a heavenly Father, but they do not understand why he does not show his credentials.

Blomaert, Adoration of the Magi

There are pious folk, of course, who are not bothered by this problem. This Father God is already part and parcel of their spiritual inventory. They automatically draw on the care and leading of their heavenly Father in every situation, and they do so with great confidence and serenity.

Sometimes, in fact, they blandish their concept of God as Father a little too glibly. It is not the product of a difficult inner struggle. Then there is the danger that when they are suddenly and painfully tested this concept of God as Father will crumble.

Therefore, it is perhaps a good thing if we are bothered by the silence of God in human affairs. The psalmist and the prophets experienced this silence as an inner conflict. The writer of the Psalms complained that his enemies taunted him, "Where is your God?" And Asaf begs in Psalm 83: "Oh God, do not keep silent; be not quiet, Oh God, be not still." Isaiah has Israel complain: "My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God." Philip, one of the disciples, said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." He undoubtedly wanted to see some special works performed by the Father, perhaps a sign from heaven.

To repeat once more: a Father must manifest himself. He must oppose everything in this world that is evil and violent. We ought to be able to see him as he prevents earthquakes and tsunamis and wards off dangers. A Father heals you when you are sick and provides bread to eat. What good is a Father who allows half of the world to go hungry and who cannot stop wars?

But then we catch ourselves and stifle our complaints. For we find ourselves standing beside the manger in Bethlehem. There we realize: those who have seen this Child have seen the Father. That's what Jesus told Philip: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

This was true earlier on that Christmas night, for in that newborn child we came to know the Father as our Father.

In this child, in his child, the Father answered all our complaints and granted all our desires. When he turns against everything in this world that is evil and violent – first of all in our lives – then he does so in and through this child. In this child he reconciles the world to himself and turns curse into blessing. No matter what disaster and hunger may overcome us, this child brings the Father's bread and shelter to the hungering sinner.

This child brings new life and a new world. There is no greater, no deeper demonstration of the Father's love than the coming of this child. It is here, in Bethlehem's manger, that the Father shows his active presence and his credentials.

This is what we must come to see at Christmas. This is what we must understand with all our hearts.

But seeing this is not easy. It isn't an outward but an inward seeing, a seeing with the eyes of faith.

When God sets out to save and heal the world, he does not reveal himself in visible shows of power. He does not strike down Caesar, nor does he block Herod's murderous path. The wars that were being waged that first Christmas went on.

God took a very different route. He came to mankind on an equal footing. He emptied himself and joined the life of his child to our suffering existence so that our suffering existence, beginning at its root – would be healed and sanctified and saved.

This a far more radical redemption than any single drastic intervention in this or that crisis in world events. This is a far more powerful intervention than any we might have demanded of God, for it is an act of unfathomable, self-denying love. It is also much more on target and its outcome much greater: it is total and absolute.

But it does not draw wide notice. It begins with an infant lying in a manger, very simple and ordinary. Gathered around, of course, are its father and mother and a few others. But that is all.

When will we stop being so superficial? Sometimes we sputter with indignation and impatience when we see no powerful evidence of God's fatherly presence in our lives. But the greatest demonstration of his fatherly presence was that he came to dwell with us incognito. He sent his Son dressed in our beggar's rags to the sinner's rood, the cross. Those who have seen the child have seen the Father – but then they must see truly.

Once we have seen, our lives are changed. Then through this child we receive not only the Father's reconciliation but also the knowledge that in this child he will give us all things – including redemption, safety, healing, bread, and much more. For this child is the spring of new life for all mankind in the broadest sense of the word. This child recreates all human relationships and becomes the root of a new community and order. He restores his Father's world.

And we do not only see what we have received through this child but also what we may and must do. By the power of this child, we begin to see and to seek to obey in every area of this diverse life.

For those who have seen the child have not only seen the Father's love but also the Father's sovereignty and justice.

Story

The blemish and the tablecloth

Richard Bauman

"What a storm," Paul said to himself, as he unlocked the front door of the church.

As he stepped into the building, the unmistakable odor of water-soaked plaster caught his attention. "The roof leaked, again," he said aloud, to himself, as if surprised – which, of course, he wasn't.

Paul, his wife, Teresa, and most members of the congregation were used to the shortcomings of the church's old roof during rainstorms. The small puddles of rainwater were easily mopped up. And when it rained during services, pails strategically located in the aisles and in certain pews collected most of the precipitation that made it through the roof.

But this time it was different. The gale-force wind and relentless rain had torn off some more roofing. A torrent of water flowed down the inside of the wall behind the altar, staining the white paint a pale, dirty brown and saturating the plaster.

Some of the plaster had crumbled and oozed down the wall, creating a soggy gray lump behind the altar table. An ugly, gapping hole disfigured the wall. Paul's eyes were drawn to it like iron to a magnet.

"It could be beautiful," Teresa had said a few months earlier, her blue eyes sparkling as she looked around the old church for the first time.

"It is beautiful," Paul replied, "because it's our church."

And so it was. Only a few years out of seminary, and just 33 years old, Paul was tall, slender and handsome. But he had been called to pastor a church that was anything but handsome. Although the neighborhood had once contained elegant houses – "Millionaires' Row" it was once called – now, in 1949, for the most part it was a working class area. A few wealthy families remained, but most members of the congregation were working men and women who only dreamed of being wealthy.

The church, big, but not overly large, had been beautiful at one time too. A lack of funds and years of make-do maintenance, and the church now blended in with the declining neighborhood. Nonetheless, Paul and Teresa sensed they could make it an attractive church again, and perhaps revitalize its sagging membership.

They had set a goal of having the church sparkling for Christmas, and then spent nearly every free moment working in the church, preparing it. Despite aching muscles brought on by seemingly never-ending tasks, they cleaned and polished the dark wood of each pew, dusted ledges, scraped yellowing wax from the floor and covered it with a glistening coat of new polish. Together they transformed the old church into an inviting and pleasant, if not beautiful, place. Just a few days before Christmas they had declared their goal achieved.

But the damage to the sanctuary wall eclipsed all their work. There was no time, not to mention funds, to hire a craftsman to repair the ruined plaster.

Just when the church was on the verge of being beautiful for the Christmas Eve midnight celebration, it was blemished.

Disheartened, Paul wanted to blame God for the storm and the spoiled wall. He wanted to shout at God, "Why, with all the work we've done did you allow this too happen? Why couldn't you have sent the storm the day after tomorrow instead of last night?" But he knew that was ridiculous. The storm was part of nature, and the roof leaked for lack of maintenance and money. It wasn't God's wrath unleashed; it was a rainstorm and a decaying roof that had caused the damage.

Paul cleaned up the soggy mass of plaster. Using a dustpan and broom, he scooped up the debris and dumped it into a trash barrel. Dejected, he went home to tell Teresa about the damage.

"You know, Paul, God will take care of this," she said, as she poured him a cup of coffee. "St. Paul wrote that all things work for the good."

He knew Scripture, and he knew she was right, but that didn't lift his feeling of discouragement. He kept seeing that huge, dirty brown hole in the white plaster wall. It was centered on the wall right behind the altar table, and no matter how brilliant the sermon, nor how good the services, all eyes would be focused on that blemish on the wall.

"It's time to go, Paul," Teresa called from the kitchen, "It's nearly 7 o'clock."

"Go where?"

"To the auction."

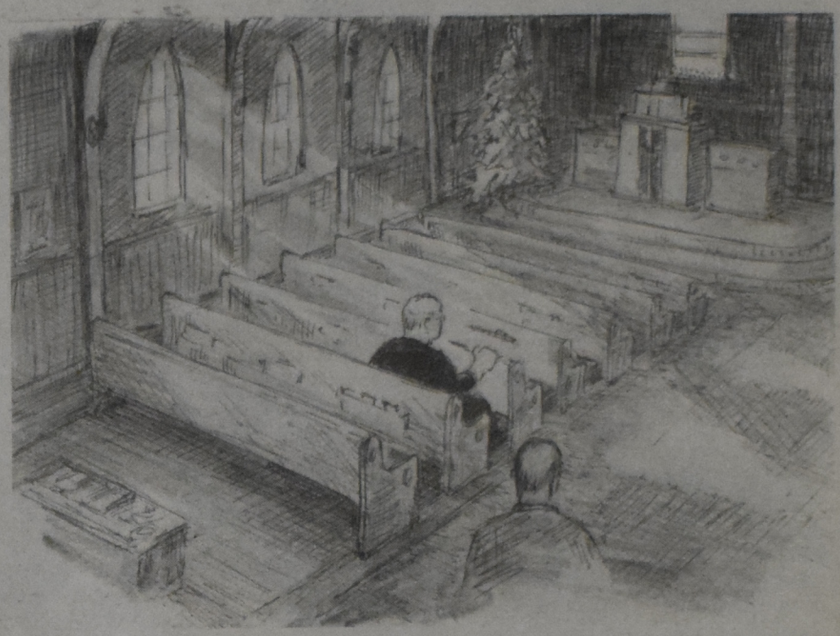
"Auction?"

"The fund raiser," she replied. "To benefit war refuges. Did you forget?"

He remembered now, and sagged a little deeper into his chair. He sure didn't feel like going. But how would it look, he thought, for the pastor to be absent? So he grabbed his tan overcoat from the hall closet, and Teresa's too, and when he turned around she was there, ready for him to help her put it on.

When the auction started, Paul listlessly bid on a few items, and was relieved when he didn't win them. His pulse quickened, however, when the auctioneer held up a huge lace tablecloth. It was ivory interwoven with golden threads. Obviously handmade, yet it wasn't overly delicate. Even in the poorly lighted church hall, Paul could tell it was perfect.

The bidding started at dollar, and



quickly went to three, then four. At five dollars it was just Paul and Mrs. Carlson bidding for the tablecloth.

"What are you doing?" Teresa whispered to him.

"You'll see," he replied with a grin.

The bidding went to seven, then eight, then eight-fifty.

When Paul said, "Ten," Mrs. Carlson, who had been bidding against him, didn't offer a new bid. The auctioneer smacked his gavel on the table: "Sold to Pastor Thorton for ten dollars."

When Paul and Teresa left the auction, Paul had the tablecloth under his arm. "I bought this to hang behind the altar. It will look terrific there – and cover the hole in the wall."

Teresa only nodded. Though she didn't know how they would fill the major ten-dollar hole in their budget, she smiled, took hold of Paul's right arm, and snuggled close to him.

Paul whistled as he quickly took the steps to the front door of the church, the tablecloth in a brown paper bag under his arm. Although it was cold and the wind made the air biting, the sun shone brightly.

As he swung open the door, he noticed the woman standing at the nearby bus stop. She was older, her hair in the final stages of fading to gray. He called to her, and invited her to wait in the church, where she would be warm. "The bus won't be here for at least a half-hour," he said.

She walked briskly to the church, smiling at Paul as he held the door open for her.

Thanking him for his kindness, she explained she wasn't from the neighborhood. She was here seeking work. She was a war refugee, she said, and she had applied for a job with the Edwards family, as a governess.

Paul recognized the family name, one of the few wealthy families that still lived in the area.

"But they didn't hire me because I don't speak good enough English."

He felt a twinge of sadness for her.

Paul excused himself, and she sat down in one of the pews in the middle of the church. Finding the ladder, a hammer and some hooks in the maintenance closet, he worked quickly. He installed eight hooks above the plaster disaster.

After the last hook was in place, he fetched the tablecloth, re-climbed the ladder, found a corner of the tablecloth and slipped it over the first hook. He repeated the process for the next half-dozen hooks. When the last corner of the tablecloth was in place, he heard a gasp from the back of the church.

Startled, Paul turned around and saw the woman rushing down the main aisle of the church toward him. He had forgotten she was there. Her face revealed excitement and disbelief.

"That's mine," she said, firmly, yet her voice subdued. "That's my banquet cloth."

Hurrying to the altar, she lifted the left corner of the tablecloth and pointed to the initials, JH woven into the design.

"They stand for Julia Hessburg – that's me."

Then she told Paul the history of the tablecloth – and her history, too.

She and her husband, Walter, had lived in Vienna, Austria in the late 1930s. When it became evident the Nazis blanket of power and treachery would soon engulf them, Walter sent her to Switzerland and to safety. He promised to ship their belongings after her, and then he would

Story/Forgiveness

make his way to Switzerland too.

Neither Walter nor their possessions had arrived.

"I later learned he died in a Nazi concentration camp."

Paul's throat constricted with emotion, and he could barely whisper, "Please, take your banquet cloth. It must mean a lot to you. I want you to have it."

Julia thought for a moment, shook her head, turned and walked up the center aisle of the church. She pushed through the old church doors, sunlight flowed in and enveloped her – and she was gone as if she had been absorbed by the light.

Several hundred people gathered in the church for the midnight service on Christmas Eve. At the end of the service, Paul greeted the people in the church foyer. Most remarked on his sermon and commented, too, on how good the church looked, especially that dazzling lace and gold cloth behind the altar.

Gradually all the people had left, save one – an old man. He seemed transfixed by the altar. When he realized he was the only one left in the church, he hurriedly tugged on his overcoat, picked up his hat and headed for the door.

Embarrassed by his tardiness, he simply nodded to Paul as he walked past, but then he stopped, turned and said, "Reverend, you know, my wife and I once had a banquet cloth that looked like that," nodding toward the altar, "When we lived in Vienna. But that was before the war, and before concentration camps and cruel deaths."

The chills and goose bumps that instantly coated Paul's body weren't caused by the frigid night air. "Walter?" he gulped, "Walter Hessburg?"

The old man's eyes widened, and instinctive fear covered his face. He looked intently at Paul. "How do you know my name?" he said, suspicion in voice. "I don't go to church here. I came tonight only so I wouldn't be alone on Christmas Eve."

Paul paused for a moment before answering, choosing his words carefully. "This morning I had a conversation with a woman who recalled having a banquet cloth too, when she lived in Vienna, with her husband, before the war. Her name was Julia."

Walter's eyes grew wide; his mouth dropped open, and he trembled. "She is alive? My Julia is alive? Here? Where is she?"

For an instant Paul's heart sank. Where, indeed, was she? He had no idea in what part of the city she lived, let alone her address. He was silent for a moment, then remembered the Edwards family, where she had applied to for the job. Perhaps they had Julia's address. He didn't know the family's phone number, but he knew how to get it.

"No, it can't wait until morning," Paul spoke into the phone, after he introduced himself and told Mr. Edwards that he wanted Julia's address. "It's a matter of utmost urgency, or I wouldn't be calling you at this hour."

Several minutes passed, which seemed nearly an eternity to Paul, and even longer to Walter, who paced as they waited for Mr. Edwards to find the address.

"Thank you, Mr. Edwards, and Merry Christmas."

In return Paul heard the phone's dial tone.

Tears brimmed in Walter's eyes as he read the address. He knew the building; a former client lived there.

Walter gave Paul directions to Julia's apartment building. As they made their way from the church through mostly deserted streets in Paul's old Plymouth, anticipation mingled with anxiety kept the two men silent with their thoughts.

The apartment building was dark, save for weak light bulbs and the miserly light they gave up in the stairwell and halls. As they climbed the stairs to the second floor, apprehension rose in Paul's throat. What, if by some odd coincidence, this Julia wasn't Walter's Julia? What if she had remarried? What if she refused to believe this man was her "deceased" husband?

Paul and Walter paused outside the apartment door. They looked at each other, smiling nervously in an attempt to hide their uneasiness.

Paul knocked on the door. In the dim stillness the sound pounded down the hall. When there was no answer, he knocked again, harder. The sound of someone stirring on the other side of the door, and then a soft voice asking, "Who is it?"

"Mrs. Hessburg, Julia, it's Paul Thorton, we met this morning at my church." Feeling he needed to say something else, he added: "I have something important for you."

As the doorlatch turned, Paul took hold of Walter's left arm and moved him in front of the door. Cautiously Julia opened the door an inch or two. Light sprayed out from behind her, as she peeked from her apartment.

For several seconds she said nothing, her eyes adjusting to the hallway's subdued light. Slowly she realized she wasn't looking at Paul, but rather an older, but nonetheless familiar face.

"Walter?" She whispered. Slowly she opened the door further, and moved forward to see him better. "Walter? Can that be you?"

Walter reached out, touched Julia's face. "It is you. My Julia." They were in each other's arms now, holding one another tightly, crying and laughing at the same instant. They had a thousand questions – how, where, what – and they had no questions at the same time.

They looked into one another's eyes so intently, they seemed to be afraid to look away for fear that what they were seeing might disappear.

Paul stealthily backed down the hall toward the stairwell and away from Julia's apartment door, away from Walter and Julia. As he quietly descended the stairs, he whispered a prayer of thanksgiving for being able witness Julia and Walter's reunion. And if someone had been walking next to him, they would have heard him thank God, too, for the rain-damaged wall in his church.

He also admitted to God that Teresa had been right – all things do work for the greater good.

He stepped into the dark, frosty, Christmas morning air – but he didn't feel the cold.

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

If you have hurt someone....APOLOGIZE!

I enjoy having a cup of coffee in an obscure corner of the food court in our local mall during the month of December. The atmosphere is full of festive cheer and unrelenting goodwill towards those who are less fortunate. Years ago the frenzy around Christmas shopping used to bother me but now I appreciate the obvious generosity that is so much part of a Canadian Christmas. That in itself is a good reason to celebrate Christmas. Every gift and food hamper – a metaphor for God's gift of his Son to our world.

Lately, Christmas at the mall reminds me of a young woman who came to see me a few times in the fall several years ago. During our sessions she would tearfully talk about her confusion in regards to her relationship with her previous boyfriend who suddenly packed up and left her to move south of the border. They had known each other for about three years and had been talking about getting married. She had put a lot of effort into the relationship and was looking forward to spending the rest of her life with this young man. There were many joys in the relationship and yes, there were some difficulties, but doesn't everyone experience some of those? She saw this as normal. Yet, he left her without any warning or discussion.

She was angry, hurt, broken, sad and confused. What happened, she wondered. What could she have done to prevent this? He did not contact her, so she could only worry and wonder. Whenever she came to see me she would go through her relationship with him with a fine toothcomb. She could not figure it out. She became uncertain about her memories of their relationship. She began blaming herself. She doubted her own integrity. She criticized her own lack of judgement. And so she bobbed aimlessly upon the dark waters of not knowing – unanchored and adrift.

Till one day, unbeknown to her, he returned a few weeks before Christmas. They met accidentally in the middle of the local mall. Sparkling garlands and silver stars shimmered around them as they stood facing each other. Soft strains of "Silent Night, Holy Night," enveloped them in mutual comfort at this awkward moment. He looked at her. She looked at him. He looked down, embarrassed and uncomfortable. He wanted to run. Suddenly, he squared his shoulders, took a deep breath and looked into her eyes and said, "I am so sorry, so very sorry. I mistreated you when I left you the way I did. There is no excuse. I want you to know. I am very sorry." She looked at him with tears in her eyes as she felt a huge burden fall off her shoulders and said, "Thank you, your words mean a lot to me." He shook his head and grimaced wryly. "These words are not enough, not really," he said. "I know," she replied, "but now I can at least start anew."

That was the last time she saw him. There was no attempt to get back together again. He had his life in another country and she could no longer trust him. But his apology helped her regain her confidence, as well as her sense of integrity and faith in her own judgements. She is married now and has a child but she often thinks of the Christmas gift she received at the local mall wrapped in honest effort and humble words prompted by an atmosphere of festivity and goodwill. A simple apology that stands on its own. No excuses, no rationalizations. I did you wrong. I am deeply sorry. He did not plead for forgiveness because he knew it was not his to demand but only her choice to give as part of her overall healing. And that often takes time. The road of life can only be walked one step at a time. For now, enjoy our festive Christmas and New Year season!

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca

Reviews

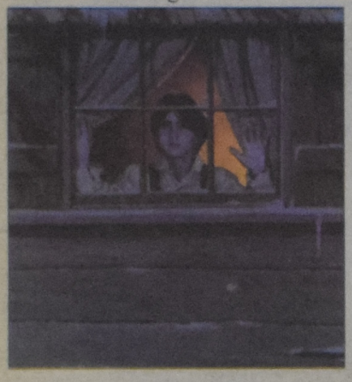
Christmas books for big ones to read with the little ones

Reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

A Cowboy Christmas: The Miracle at Lone Pine Ridge

Written by Audrey Wood, illustrated by Robert Florczak
Simon and Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2001 All Ages

Before young Evan's dad had died, he asked his best friend Cully, a cowboy, to help out at the ranch through the winter months. Each year Cully had returned. On Christmas Eve



Evan waits by the window, convinced that something terrible has happened to Cully. He persuades his mom to help him search for the cowboy. They find him in the snow, close to death, and nurse him back to health. But Evan is disappointed because, even though Cully is healed, he no longer laughs. When Cully announces that he is leaving the ranch, Evan takes matters into his own hands to ensure that Cully never leaves again. Audrey Wood's tale, inspired by the lives of American pioneer women, captures both the difficulties and joys of settlers' lives. Robert Florczak's magnificent illustrations effectively juxtapose vast, sometimes harsh nature scenes with the warmth and security of home life.

Room for a Little One: A Christmas Tale

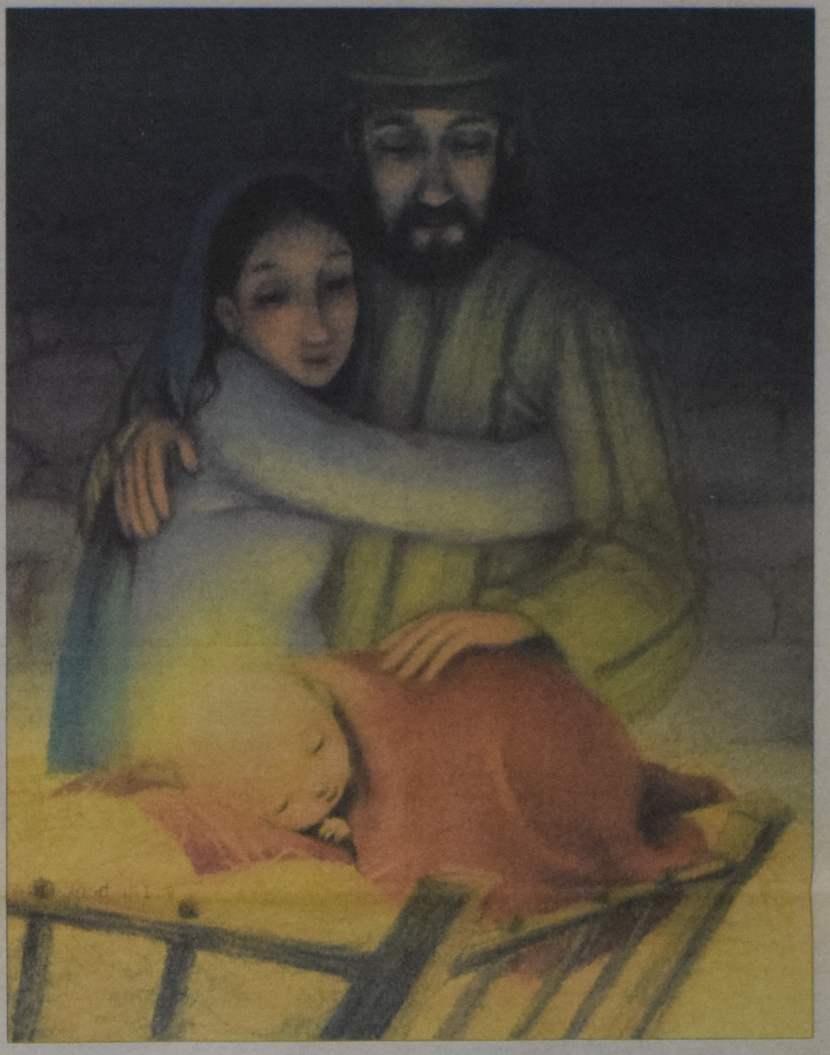
Written by Martin Waddell, illustrated by Jason Cockcroft
Margaret K. McElderry Books, 2004 Ages 3-7

On a cold winter night Kind Ox rests in his stable close to an inn. One by one, animals who normally live in animosity toward each other – Old Dog, Stray Cat, and Small Mouse – come searching for shelter. Kind Ox reassures each one, "There's always room for a little one here." Later, Tired Donkey arrives carrying Mary who is anxious about where her baby will be born. Kind Ox repeats his welcoming refrain. Safe in the stable, Mary gives birth to Jesus – the Little One who came for the world. Waddell's simply told tale and Cockcroft's mellow illustrations give a foretaste of a creation restored because of Jesus' presence and power.

Shall I Knit You a Hat? A Christmas Yarn

Written by Kate Klise, illustrated by M. Sarah Klise
Henry Holt and Company, 2004 Ages 3-8

A fierce winter storm is brewing. Little Rabbit is dismayed at the thought of snow so deep it will reach the tips of his ears. So, Mother Rabbit knits him a hat to keep his ears warm. Though he is immensely pleased with his mother's creation, a thought nags at him. Shouldn't all of his friends have hats, too? Together, the rabbits surreptitiously measure the horse, goose, deer, dog, cat, and squirrel – and Mother Rabbit knits each a hat. After giving the gifts to the animals, Little Rabbit is distressed when he remembers that he didn't buy his mother a present. She assures him, "Being with you is the best gift of all." Bright, detailed illustrations complement the winsome, charming text which celebrates friendship and generosity.



A Gift for the Christ Child

Written by Tina Jahnert, illustrated by Alessandra Roberti
North-South Books, 2004 Ages 3-8

Miriam doesn't find it easy being the youngest child of the innkeeper. She is jealous of her older brother Malachi who is allowed to do important jobs around the inn, jobs she isn't considered capable of doing yet. When she pleads with her mother to allow her to do something important, Mother promises to look for jobs she can do. In the following days when people come to town to register for a census, the inn is filled to capacity. Mother asks Miriam to lead a young man and a woman on a donkey to the stable downhill from the inn. Later that night, Miriam is awakened by a bright light by the stable. She creeps to the outbuilding, and offers the Christ Child a gift. Any child who has longed to be older and more important will empathize with Miriam, and will appreciate the acceptance and love she experiences.

How Many Miles to Bethlehem?

Written by Kevin Crossley-Holland, illustrated by Peter Malone
Orion Children's Books, 2004
Ages 4-9

One by one, Mary, the inn keeper, the ox, Joseph, and all the other animals and people in the Christmas story reveal what lives in their hearts. The uncertainty, uncomfortableness, and danger, as well as the mystery and majesty, of the first Christmas are portrayed through their voices, each one building on the previous utterance. Extraordinary illustrations, evoking Renaissance art, make this picture book a visual feast.

Reviews

Asleep in the Stable

Written by Will Hillenbrand Holiday House, 2004 Ages 1-4

Baby Owl lives in the stable with his mother. While all the other animals sleep, Baby Owl looks wide-eyed at the family resting in the straw beneath his perch. He peppers Mama with questions: "WHOOOO is that baby sleeping in the nest below? WHOOOO is that man with the beard? WHOOOO is that lady in the blue dress? Did she lay his egg?" Patiently and lovingly, Mama answers his questions, and the tale of God's love for the world is told. Hillenbrand's text – both serious and humorous – and his illustrations capture the earthiness and the mystery of Christ's birth.

Bartholomew's Blessing: A Christmas Story

Written by Stephanie S. Tolan, illustrated by Margie Moore Harper Collins Publishers, 2004 Ages 4-8

Bartholomew Mouse is used to being ignored. So, when a donkey and two sheep barrel past him without answering his questions – "What's happening?' And "Where are you going?" – he isn't surprised. But he is shocked when an angel announces the birth of the Prince of Peace, and invites him to come to the stable to receive a blessing. Bartholomew collects gifts for the Prince – a barley head, a seed pod, and a red stone. When he tries to cross the stream by the stable, he falls in and loses all his gathered gifts. Still, he presses on. In the presence of the Prince he no longer feels worthless and ignored, but blessed instead. This simple tale shows that Jesus Christ's love embraces his entire creation.

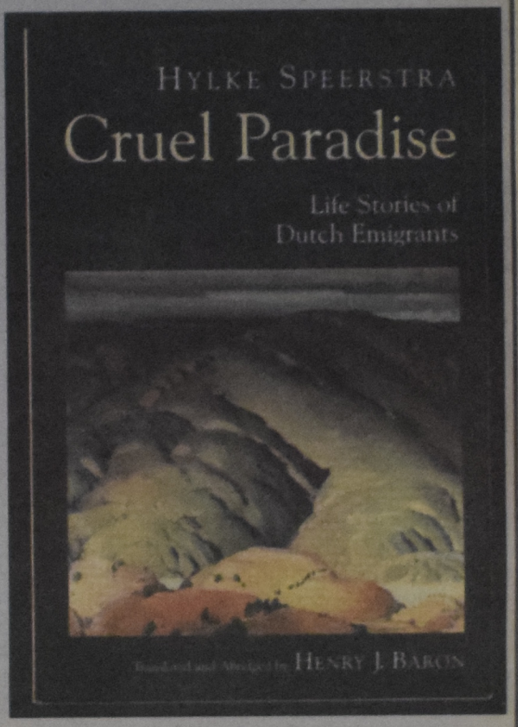
The Christmas Promise

Written by Susan Bartoletti & illustrated by David Christiana The Blue Sky Press, 2001 Ages 4-9

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, a young girl and her father pack up all their belongings, move to the rail yard, and sneak into an open box car. As they travel from town to town in search of work, Poppa promises his daughter that soon they'll find a good place to live. However, there's no work to be found. In each town Poppa searches out the hobo signs – a communication system of chalked figures that tell wanderers where food, shelter, jobs, or danger can be found. As winter approaches, the girl sees signs of Christmas. Worried, she asks Poppa, "Do hoboes have Christmas?" Poppa replies, "They figure out a way." And Poppa is true to his word. This historically accurate narrative celebrates humanity's ability and desire to persevere despite poverty and hardship.

Remarkable tales of uprootedness, nostalgia and joy

Cruel Paradise: Life Stories of Dutch Emigrants by Hylke Speerstra, translated and abridged by Henry J. Baron. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005. 224 pp. $15.00 US, Paperback.



Reviewed by **Bert Witvoet**

The title *Cruel Paradise: Life Stories of Dutch Emigrants* hints immediately at the dreams and disillusionment that emigrants from the Netherlands experienced in their adoptive countries since World War II. Author Hylke Speerstra based his stories on visits he paid to emigrants in the United States, Canada, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia, the main destinations for post-war Dutch emigrants. Actually, the people he writes about all hail from the province of Friesland, and the original was written in Frisian. That's the version I read a few years ago. Entitled *It Wrede Paradys: Libbensferhalen fan Fryske Folksferhuzers*, this original contains 33 stories instead of the 20 I now find in the abridged English version, and it includes people that ended up in South America as well. Since then, the book has been translated into Dutch, and, now, recently, it has been rendered into English by Henry J. Baron, emeritus professor of English and Dutch at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Baron is equally at home in the Frisian language as in English, and he has done a marvelous job of turning the rich, earthy Frisian into rich, flowing English prose.

The life stories of Dutch emigrants are captivating. The book is like an anthology of short stories, each with its own plot. But Speerstra also has a sharp eye for the landscape that surrounds his chosen subjects. Take the vividly painted setting from the chapter on John Reitsma from Jerome, Idaho, USA: "A look through the front room window of John and Susan Reitsma: the décor of a surrealistic painting by Salvador Dali. Beneath a cloudless late afternoon sky, the Snake River twists itself through walls of rock nearly five hundred feet high, a silvery snake which farther on slithers inside the brown-red mountains of the Canyons. The sun sinks; soon distant rock formations will drain the red globe."

It is into that kind of setting that Speerstra weaves his tales, as related to him by the people whose lives were pulled from the ancient soil in that far-away Friesland. Take, for example, one of my favorites: the story of Okke Jansma from Highton Australia.

Okke Jansma is retired, and he spends a lot of time in his shed, chiseling and planing and polishing away, not only on the wood but also on his life. His thoughts go back to when he was a boy in Sumar, Friesland. Sometimes he finds himself swearing at people from his distant past. At old Wiebe Paulsma and his little boat, for example. Wiebe had once said to young Okke, "So, you're a grandson of Jabik Skunk!"

Okke remembers being in a skating race with his second cousin. The two were the finalists in this race. "So it was our turn again," says Okke to Speerstra. "But this was a tiebreaker: one of us had to win. I stood at the starting line. Through my tears from the cold wind, I saw all of a sudden the little boat of Wiebe Paulusma at the other end.... That simpleton had the gall to call my grandpa by his nickname! In that last race I headed straight for Wiebe's little boat. I didn't see ice anymore, I didn't feel ice anymore. I screamed: I'm going to kick you in the balls with my ice skates.' And I won the prize. I won three brand-new guilder bills. I don't know if I felt the way I feel it now. There was no one to meet me, no one to congratulate me. Dad was always at work. I felt darn lonely for a little while."

And with that story, the reader is drawn into the pain of Okke's life, the cruel and harsh way his dad had treated him many decades ago. Later on, his aging dad admitted that he had driven his son away to a far country. And there stands Okke in his shed, years later, thousands of miles away from Sumar, still bursting with anger at the memories. In a way, the cruel paradise is the Friesland of his boyhood. But so is his life in Australia, as he unexpectedly loses his young Australian wife, Betty, to a lung embolism. "During that awful time I would sometimes stand on top of the cliffs by the southern coast and scream at the ocean. The fatal coast," recounts Okke. "And when I had done all the yelling I could, I'd limp back to land, completely spent."

You do get the impression from reading the book, that Hylke Speerstra focused especially on those immigrants who went through a great deal of pain and suffering as they adjusted to a new life in a strange country. Suffering produces drama, and his stories are full of it. But not all accounts leave that feeling. Take for example the story of Henry Baron, the translator of Speerstra's book. The suffering that he and his family endured were not necessarily connected with emigration: the church split in Holland, the untimely death of a father in the new country, Henry's own bout with TB. Over all, life turned into a rather pleasant paradise experience for Henry Baron who ended up a professor at a highly respected Christian college.

I heartily recommend *Cruel Paradise* to anyone who loves biographical stories and is not up to reading the unabridged Frisian original. No doubt, the experiences recounted here will reverberate in the lives of all those who have their own emigration stories to tell, either because they themselves left their homeland, or because their parents or grandparents did.

Story

First Guitar

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

"Is that the first guitar you owned?" a freckled boy in the seventh grade class asked me. My brother Nick smiled at his student and then winked at me. A girl in the next row snickered, "What a dumb question! Of course, it isn't!" "Should I tell them about my first guitar?" I asked Nick, unsure that a 32-year-old professional guitarist should parade her past sins in front of her brother's students. "Tell us," a gray-eyed girl called out. "It's up to you," Nick said. "There's enough time before the bell rings." So I launched into my story.

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When I was 11, my parents hid our Christmas presents throughout the house before we opened them on Christmas Eve. I had pleaded for a guitar, imagining myself as a famous guitarist strumming for huge audiences. Perhaps I also longed for one because I loved music, but I sounded like a crow whenever I sang. Several of my report cards confirmed that fact: "Kelsey tries to sing, but her voice is too harsh," and "Kelsey doesn't stay in tune." I wanted a guitar because it would sing for me. "Okay, kids," Dad said, "start hunting for your presents." My three younger brothers scurried upstairs to search the bedrooms, but I dashed to the basement because earlier I had heard Mom shuffling around down there. In the dark, musty fruit cellar, behind Dad's cluttered, dusty workbench, beside the linty dryer, and in the empty closet of the spare bedroom I searched for the gift with my name on it.

Nothing!

Just as I was about to leave the bedroom I noticed a bulge behind the burgundy, velvet curtains that hung over the windows from the ceiling to the floor. Through the curtains I felt a large, awkwardly shaped box, narrow at the top, broader at the base. My guitar! I yanked the heavy curtains aside and saw the name tag on the gift. Nicky – my brother – four years younger than I! What I did next still astounds me. Leaving the present behind the curtains, I tiptoed to Dad's workbench and grabbed an indelible black marker. In the murky shadows behind the curtains I whisked the cap off the marker. One brisk, black swoop blotted out my brother's name. Shakily, I wrote KELSEY above the black bar. I stuck the marker in my jeans pocket, gulped, and then yelled all the way upstairs, "I found my present!" Five-year-old Lyle and 4-year-old Trevor sat on the living room floor, impatiently waiting to unwrap their gifts. "Thanks, Mom! Thanks, Dad!" I squeaked, staring at the floor. Then I glanced up, because there was no sound, no movement. My parents stared at each other. Mom opened her mouth to speak, but Dad gently touched her shoulder. A message passed between them that I couldn't decipher. Then Dad said, "Enjoy it, Kelsey." I sighed shakily. Grumbling, Nicky walked in. "I can't find my present," he complained. "Help me, Mom!" "Come on, let's look for it." Mom and Nicky walked in the direction of the office.

My stomach twisted. Moments later Nicky returned with a gift shaped like mine. When he set it on the floor, I noticed that the green, shiny wrapping paper was ripped where a nametag used to be. From youngest to oldest, we took turns opening our gifts. Trevor's cuddly, stuffed bunny and Lyle's orange, plastic toolbox elicited happy shouts. Then Nicky opened his present – a golden, beautifully-crafted guitar! Apprehensively, I tore the wrapping paper off my gift and slowly read the words on the box:

A Best Harmony Fine Student Guitar.

Steel Reinforced Neck.

Best Hardwood Body and Strings.

Handcrafted with Selected Materials.

Model 330.

I cautiously opened the box and gulped when I saw the runty guitar inside. Then I understood. I had taken what wasn't mine, while the gift I had longed for was there all along with my name on it. Nicky enthusiastically strummed the larger guitar, pretending to be a rock star. Clasping the puny guitar in my sweating hands, I watched his joyful antics as if from an immense, numbing distance. After Mom and Dad had opened their gifts, Dad said, "Kelsey, please help me in the kitchen for a minute." "Can't Nicky help, too?" I pleaded. I didn't want to be alone with Dad right then. "Nicky can help Mom pick out a game for us to play," he said. "Come on." I put the guitar on the floor and tried to shove it under the couch. In the kitchen Dad took a bag filled with grapes from the fridge. "Wash these, and cut the stems into small clumps." He took a bowl out of the cupboard. "Put them in here when you're finished." While I washed the grapes and cut their woody stems, Dad sliced cheddar cheese onto a plate. "Do you like your guitar?" he asked. "Sure. It's great," I lied, my eyes focused on the sharp scissors. "When I was about nine years old," Dad said reflectively, as he started to place crackers on a plate, "I was standing beside a little girl, Katie, during a Christmas concert. She was sucking on a piece of hard candy and trying to sing at the same time." I squirmed. Why was Dad telling me this story? "All of a sudden Katie choked and sputtered. Our teacher stopped the choir and reached over to help Katie, whose face was getting redder and redder. Katie's mother ran from her seat and thumped Katie's back. The candy shot out of her mouth. Katie's mother said, "I told you not to sing with candy in your mouth. You can't sing with something stuck in your craw." Dad paused. Then he said quietly and firmly, "Kelsey." I nervously organized the grapes in the bowl, refusing to look up. But Dad waited until I did. He held my gaze. "I guess Katie's mother was right? You can't make beautiful music when something is choking you up inside." Just then Lyle dashed into the kitchen. "Let me do that, Kelsey!" "Put the bowl on the table, Lyle." Dad said. "Then call Mom and the boys to come into the kitchen for our snack." For the rest of the evening we played Fun City and munched on snacks. Later, I expected Mom to confront me when she came into my bedroom to say goodnight and to pray with me. I almost hoped she would so that I could confess and be free of the tightness in my throat. At Christmas dinner the next evening, Lyle piped up, "Why did Kelsey get the little guitar – and she's 11? And why did Nicky get the big guitar – and he's only seven?" I sputtered on a piece of turkey. Dad and Mom exchanged worried glances. Nicky blushed. I suddenly realized that he had wondered the same thing, but had been too embarrassed to ask about it. My eyes stung. I swallowed and swallowed. I will not cry, I told myself. I will not tell them what I did. Then Lyle asked, "Why are you crying, Kelsey?"

There was no stopping my tears then. And there was no hiding the truth any longer. So, I confessed. The black marker. Nicky's name blotted out. My name replacing Nicky's. Nicky's face flushed as he realized that the grand, golden guitar had definitely been meant for me because I was older. In his deep blue eyes, I saw a fierce struggle emerging. Because of what I had done it was rightfully his, but should he keep it? No one spoke. Then Nicky slid back his chair and left the table without excusing himself. His determined steps drummed up the stairs, then faded down the hallway. Moments later he returned with the splendid guitar and handed it to me. "Here," he said bravely. "I want you to have it." Not right away, but years later, I realized that the greatest gift I received that Christmas wasn't my first guitar. It was Nicky's generosity, grace, and forgiveness. I also understood that that year I had experienced Easter at Christmas.

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"So, that's the story about my first guitar," I said to Nick's students. "Play one more Christmas song before you go," the freckled boy said. "How about Amazing Grace?" I suggested. "That's not a Christmas song," the boy replied. "In my book, it is!" I said.

Story

An Unexpected Gift

Jeanette Duncan

It was a Christmas we were all dreading.

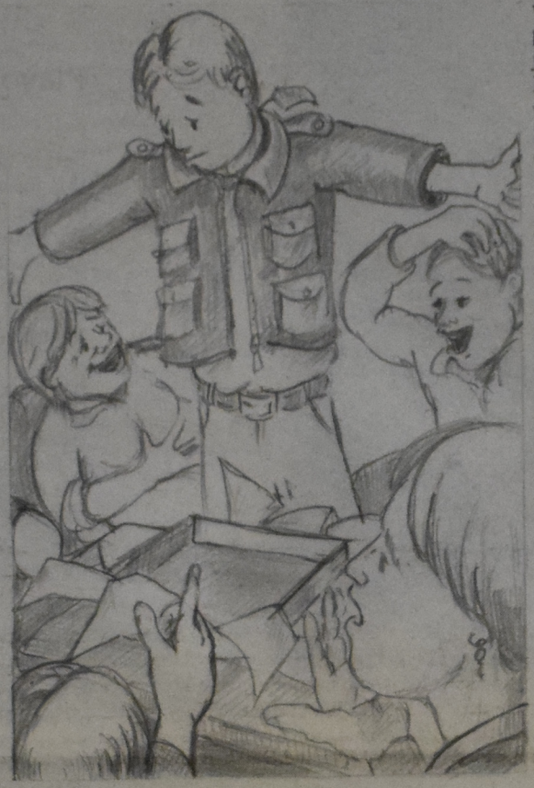
Every Christmas Grandpa and Grandma joined our family as we unwrapped presents. With my parents, six kids, two spouses, and five grandchildren, it was a noisy but fun time.

We had our traditions, as every family does. We all love our Dutch heritage, and every year Grandma and Grandpa gave each of us a chocolate letter. Before we tore the wrapping paper off the boxes we knew what was in them: 65 grams of chocolate shaped in the first initial of our names. Chocolate letters were as sure as Baby Jesus at Christmas.

But this year, it would be different.

With Christmas only four weeks after Grandma's funeral, none of us felt like celebrating. The cancer that had been in remission had suddenly and viciously returned. I hadn't been prepared for her death, and still rebelled against it.

Did God care about us during this time of tears and anger? How could we celebrate Christmas without her?



Grandpa told Mom between tears that he still wanted to do our normal things for Christmas. As hard as it was, he told her, Grandma would have wanted us to do it. Besides, there wasn't much to do. She'd already bought the chocolate letters; all he had to do was wrap them.

I dreaded Christmas all the more. Seeing the chocolate letters, and knowing that Grandma had bought them, would make it all the harder. Yet we still came, gathering at my parents' home like we always did.

We did our best, joking and trying to pretend we were going to make it through Christmas Day without tears. The house was fragrant with spiced apple cider and lit up with tiny white lights. Yet without Grandma it felt as hollow as a movie set. Occasionally one or several of us would steal away for a few tears. We tried to be brave, and hoped our smiles would hide puffy eyes.

Grandpa handed out the chocolate letters. He was proud of himself; for the first time in his life he'd wrapped presents. We pretended not to notice edges peeking out or the extra tape. We smiled watery smiles at him, thanking him, hugging him.

He couldn't stay for very long. It was too hard.

A pall settled over all of us. When would this be over, so that the rest of us could return to our homes to grieve privately?

Then my parents started handing out their presents to us. My husband went first. He unwrapped a bright orange hunting jacket.

Strange, I thought, *they know he doesn't hunt*. Paul put it on. He looked ridiculous.

I wondered what he would say in the car on the way home. For now, he thanked them, telling them it "fit nice".

I was next. "What a warm sweater," I said optimistically, pulling on one of the most hideous sweaters I'd ever seen. I put it on and instantly aged fifty years.

Pete, my brother-in-law, got an insulated hunting rifle case. He doesn't have any rifles. All the girls got dreadful sweaters from the same store. My brother Peter, who hates Ford, got an expensive Ford decal to put on his Toyota. My sister Marianne opened an expensive Atlas of Canada – the perfect gift for a fashion conscious teen.

My sister Harmony was last. In her early twenties, she had a reputation for having a heavy foot while driving, and had had several fender benders recently. She unwrapped a tool that was guaranteed to pull dents out of cars. Harmony glared at Mom and Dad.

They burst out laughing, and kept laughing until tears streamed down their faces. We chuckled politely, wondering why our frugal parents had wasted so much money for the sake of a practical joke. Finally they calmed down enough to talk.

"We didn't feel like getting presents this year," Mom said.

I nodded as we all listened, feeling tears well up.

"But I said to Dad, 'Honey, we have to go. It's Christmas.' So we got ready to go one night. But even on the way to town we didn't want to be shopping. Dad said to me, 'Let's just get gift certificates.' He thought Canadian Tire would be good for the guys. So we went there to get them."

Dad picked up the story. "But then while we were there we felt bad about getting just gift certificates, so we thought we'd look around a little. But it's so hard knowing what to buy. I picked up something, and then we just weren't sure if it was right, and Mom said, 'Well, they can always return it.'

"And suddenly it hit us: if you guys can return it, it doesn't matter what we get!"

Mom cut in, laughing so hard she could hardly talk. "So there we were, throwing stuff into the cart, laughing and laughing! Everyone must have thought we were drunk!"

Harmony stood up, pretending to glare at Mom and Dad, though her eyes sparkled. "Well, it's going back!" she yelled.

And suddenly we were all laughing.

Mom dug a pile of receipts from her purse and handed them out. We all knew that on Boxing Day, the day after Christmas, the stores would have huge sales on, and once we returned our presents, the money they'd given us would stretch far.

Paul's hunting jacket could become a new CD player, or a crock pot for me....

We all put on our new clothes and held up our new treasures and had our picture taken together. Our eyes may have been puffy, but we were all laughing.

The Christmas we dreaded so much has become one of my fondest memories. My fridge, years later, still displays the snapshot of all of us with our silly gifts. Yes, it was hard without Grandma there. We missed her, and it was especially hard seeing Grandpa suffering. Grieving is difficult, and though he will always miss her, his pain has eased over the years since that first hard Christmas.

But in that raw and painful time, when I feared God had forsaken us, he gave my parents a creativity beyond their own emotional resources. As personalized as the chocolate letters, our gracious heavenly Father gave us, along with the gift of his son Jesus, the gift we needed most – laughter.

And yes, on Boxing Day all our presents were returned!

Jesus Is Coming!

Another idea for a lasting Christmas gift: a book of daily readings

The meditation below is taken from Henry Gariepy, Daily Meditations: On Golden Texts of the Bible. It includes 365 meditations and is published by Eerdmans (US$ 16.00).

Jesus Is Coming!

Look, he is coming – with the clouds, and every eye will see him.

(Revelation 1:7)

Stand with me on the tiptoe of your mind and contemplate the awesome wonder of John's launching of his magnificent manuscript with the peerless proclamation, "Look, he is coming." That statement encapsulates the most awesome, colossal event of human history, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Jesus, on the eve of his departure, said to his disciples, "I will come again and receive you unto myself" (John 14:3) Luke, the church historian, records the ascension of our Lord on the Mount of Olives before five hundred followers. Without the aid of booster rockets or computers, the Lord in miraculous liftoff defies the law of gravity and ascends into heaven. As the followers stand agape in wide-eyed wonder, the angel announces: "This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back" (Acts 1:11).

Over three hundred verses, or one in every thirty in the New Testament, speak of the glorious Second Coming of Christ. It is prominent in seventeen Old Testament books, and all nine authors of the New Testament herald the event. Twenty-three of the twenty-seven New Testament books refer to our Lord's return, with three of the four books that omit it being single-chapter letters.

The Second Coming of Christ is not hinted at, it is highlighted as a dominant New Testament teaching. Let us be sure to be ready for this culminating event of history and of our lives.

With Charles Wesley we raise our voices in acclamation:

Lo! He comes with clouds descending,
Once for favored sinners slain;
Thousand thousand saints attending,
Swell the triumph of his train;
Hallelujah! God appears on earth to reign.

Poetry

Rembrandt van Rijn - The Adoration of the Shepherds

Light of the nations

The dawn breaks in the eastern sky;
The darkness over, the day is nigh.
He comes to set the nations free,
To rule in all eternity.

The gloom of ages disappears;
Past is the time of dread and fears.
New is the day of joy and light,
The morning of unknown delight.

Now are God's tender mercies shown,
Salvation's mysteries made known,
Through the remission of our sins.
Over all the world new day begins.

To those who grope in dark dismay
Beams from on high the newborn day.
He comes to make their sorrows cease,
To guide them in the ways of peace.

O rising Sun of righteousness,
Do overpower the night's distress
That nations, freed from crippling fright,
May walk and worship in Thy light.

From the Song of Zachariah
K. Hart
(Poems by Hart from the 1966 Christmas issue)

A child is born to us

The people who once walked in darkness
Have seen a great and glorious light.
Their dwelling place, once dim and sparkless,
Is flooded with a noon day bright.
Thou, Lord, hast multiplied the nation,
Increased their joy, enriched their clime.
I hear their song of jubilation,
Like people sing at harvest-time.

O gracious hour of benediction!
The Lord has come to hear our plea.
The gloom of anguish and affliction
Is over and the shadows flee.
The yoke of servitude is broken;
The rod of the oppressor done.
God has fulfilled what He has spoken,
The age of freedom has begun.

A Child is born to us, Hosanna!
A Son is given through God's care.
For those in fear he raised a banner:
This Child will be a Royal Heir.
The government upon His shoulder,
His name shall be the Prince of Peace,
Eternal Father and Upholder,
His realm shall flourish and increase.

The hope of glory to creation
Has come with rescue to His own;
The great Desire of every nation
Will bring His peace from David's throne.
Thy Counsel Wonderful my trust is,
O God of fortitude, my Shield!
They rule of righteousness and justice
Shall never end and never yield.

From Isaiah 9
K. Hart

Play it again

I
Bethlehem over the last rise,
this journey on foot.
No mention of a donkey.
Mary due shortly.
Accommodation for the night
ill lit. The chill tempered
by curious beasts.
A mattress of feed in the manger.

Where were the female family attendants?
the birthing chair?
asked 20/20
in their quest to verify
this homely story
placid scene
played on stages
throughout the Christmas season.

II
So play it again
when the awe of incarnation
is eclipsed by golden baubles
on well lit Spruce or Pine
surrounded by tinselled packages
where we kneel to read the labels
as the Holy Family waits on the hearth
warmed by the blazing fire.

III
Play the story again
of the angel and the glory
of the Lord lighting
the night sky around crusty shepherds
and sheep waking
to the announcement
of Creator become creature.

Revel in the mystery
of a great company of heavenly beings
coming alongside the angel
with choruses of "Glory
to God above!
and well wishes of peace
to us."

Tell the part of shepherds
following up on the news,
and passing it on.
And don't forget
the amazement
of the people who heard.

When the gifts are opened
let the story of the gold
frankincense and myrrh be told.
The star over the house
the wisemen,
warned by God,
thwarting Herod and returning
home
another way.

Linda Siebenga

Christmas

A shopping trip at Christmas time

Didy Prinzen

Waiting that evening in the line-up to check out my purchases, I wished I'd gone shopping in the morning. Ahead of me was a long line of people, their shopping carts filled mostly with Christmas presents.

Preparing myself for a long wait, I couldn't help listening to the music piped into the store by intercom – *Jingle Bells, Santa Claus is Coming to Town, Frosty the Snowman*. At first I listened unconsciously. The songs did not penetrate but were simply part of the background noise in a shopping mall. But slowly I became more aware of the so-called Christmas songs.

It wasn't long before they began to bother me.

"It's just a big corporation's way to create a cheerful atmosphere to keep the customers in the mood to buy!" was my thought. Well, it seemed to be working. Most of the carts ahead of me were loaded to capacity.

"I'll be home for Christmas, you can count on me," was the next song. I was surprised at how that song pulled at my heartstrings and made me think of loved ones who had long been gone. I thought, "That could be a real joy-killer. How many people here will have a loved one who isn't coming home this Christmas? People who experienced a recent loss, people separated maybe against their will, people divorced."

The cashier was doing a price-check, and I noticed my line-up was making very slow progress. I wondered how much longer I would have to be in this noisy, crowded place, growing more and more depressed because of the superficial cheerfulness. Desperately I longed for the confinement of my car where I could listen to my favorite Christmas carols.

Over the intercom came yet another song. I cringed. "Oh, no, not that one," I thought as the first chords of *Silent Night, Holy Night* came over the speakers.

"Silent Night" here? It belongs in the hushed, dimly-lit interior of a church or out in the dark and silent fields around my house. How I wished now I were there instead. But "*Silent Night, Holy Night*" in this noisy store, with its glaring lights and crowds that were interested only in shopping and fun? It was downright sacrilegious!

I still had not made it to the cashier, and my frustrations were just beginning. In the distance I heard a bell ringing and a voice bellowing, "Ho! Ho! Ho! Merry Christmas! Merry Christmas!" Apparently Santa himself was making an appearance.

"Well," I thought, "Why shouldn't he? After all, he is the main character in this show – this charade that has been made out of Christmas."

The poor man hiding underneath all that scarlet-red and woolly-white had likely become tired of sitting on his elevated throne in the adjoining mall. His elves, who'd been trying to make the frightened little boys and girls smile for the camera, no doubt needed a break too. Another element had entered the store adding still more excitement to the already carnival-like atmosphere.

"Hello, and how are you tonight?" Suddenly the voice of the girl at the cash register interrupted my reverie, still amazingly cheerful.

"Fine, thank you," I answered quickly – and quite dishonestly – while handing her my purchases. I wasn't in the mood for small talk and the girl seemed to know it.

With a "Merry Christmas" from her and a "You too" from me, I picked up my bags and quickly took off.

Getting in the car and starting for home, I first had to give my undivided attention to the busy traffic. As I slowly found my way out of town, my dejected spirit lifted. No more crowds, no more noise, no more artificial lights, no more fake stars. The only stars I saw were real, and the only lights came from the odd scattered, isolated house in the country. I inserted a tape and finally I could enjoy my own Christmas music, with only the quiet hum of the car as background noise.

Arriving at the house, I drove the car into the garage and grabbed my bags from the back seat. Suddenly I was anxious to see the star-lit sky, and I stood, gazing into the heavens in awe of God's glorious creation. In my mind I heard the angels' song, even though there were no angels visible.

All my frustrations of the evening took flight, and I regretted my impatience and judgmental spirit while in the store. Now I wished with all my heart that the people in the store tonight could be standing here beside me – the people that live in the city, whose bright city lights totally obscure the lights of heaven.

Then they could also see this star-strewn sky and see that God's stars far outshine any man-made ones. Perhaps those who do not know the Lord would catch a glimpse of the real peace of Christmas and might be inspired to look for the real Light of the world …

"Are you all right?" It was my husband calling from the backdoor.

Yes, I was all right. Reluctant to leave my sanctuary, I walked slowly towards the house.

Nativity by Corregio (detail)

Seeking darkness

Seeking darkness
far from the city's
encapsulating glow
to see

once again the night's
bright punctuation
divine exclamation
of stars

heaven piercing
heaven being pierced
me too impaled
my face

turned heavenward
awaits the sting of
hot sparks raining
earthward

sleek, sharp angels
hurtling earthward
like electric spears
piercing

my lidded winter eyes
my bone encased brain
my slow, congealing heart
my face

pale mirror of starlight
floats in the darkness
another heavenly body
adrift

among the galaxies
a faint constellation
seen only from heaven
an ember

awaiting the beat
of wings to fan
to fire and flame
from darkness
an incandescence
of Gloria
Peace
Gloria
Earth
Gloria
Man
Woman
Child
Gloria

Harry der Nederlanden

Christmas past, Christmas presence

Clint Sherwood

Now looming ever closer, the holiday tension increases as we work out schedules and menus and invitations and greeting cards and gift lists. We methodically create and check off our to-do list. As always we harbor the belief that when the last item is complete, Peace will arrive punctually at the front door. And this being the season for it, Peace really ought to have Joy in tow. We'll welcome them in, throw another log on the fire and settle in with a warm drink for some happy conversation.

But somehow it never seems to work out that way. And the harder we hunt, of course, the more elusive becomes the prey. Just a little bigger tree, we think. Just a few more lights and garlands; just one more present or one more gathering of friends.

Then we wait for the feelings. You know – something like those we had as children when the crèche was set out a couple of weeks before Christmas. All the figures were in place, but the manger was empty, we were told, because Jesus isn't born yet. Night after night we'd walk past, the glow from an orange bulb mystically lighting the inside of the pasteboard stable and the silent figures and the empty manger.

And then Christmas morning came, and an unseen hand the night before had laid Jesus in the manger. Somehow things were now complete. The same unseen hand had arranged colorful boxes around a gleaming tree. And the cookies we'd put out for Santa Claus were now only a few crumbs.

Had we only imagined it, or did we hear noises on the roof as we drifted off to sleep last night? Something happened here while we slept. Someone from outside had visited us. The evidence for it was all around us. And it gave us the best feeling in the world.

Mankind drifted off to sleep a while ago in a boozy haze of disobedience. And in our sleep we often dreamed. We dreamed of a world where things were as they used to be.

Every culture does this. Every religion recognizes this. Anyone with a thimbleful of common sense agrees with this. Someone outside made this world. Someone outside visits us. Someone outside will one day come and help us. But because we were only dreaming, we usually misunderstood what we dreamed about.

But then one starry spring night on a hillside near Bethlehem all that changed. Help arrived. Peace and Joy arrived. But not as most

Continued on page 20...

The legend of the robin

An old Christmas story retold by **John J. H. Hofland**

The sun was falling fast, a red ball slowly sinking on the western horizon. As the last rays of bright light swept the darkening skies like long fingers frantically trying to find a hold, the winds came. The flowers closed their petals as if to keep the chill out. The gaily colored birds, tired from singing, flew to their cosy shelters in the trees.

Then the sun was gone. Night had come. The lazy heat of the day gradually gaveway to the cool of the night.

In the valley below the shepherds lit their fires.

In the stable the donkey moved a little closer to the fire that had just been kindled. He let his head hang. He was tired. In the deepening gloom he saw the woman whom he had carried on his back. He thought it strange that she was still there. He felt uneasy. He was not used to having people around in the barn where he was sleeping.

The man was making a bed for the woman. It looked as if they were planning to stay.

"Oh, well," he mused, "What do I care. As long as they let me rest." His head sank a little lower. His eyelids drooped.

"It is getting colder," he thought.

Then he slept.

The hours passed in silence.

The stars, observing the sleeping world, winked at each other, as if they shared a secret.

An occasional animal flung an insult at the sleeping world. In the valley, the shepherds pulled their home-spun robes tighter around them.

In the stable the unattended fire was dying. The chill of the night crept in through the cracks in the wall.

The donkey was falling asleep again. He had been awakened by sharp cries from the corner where the woman was lying. But he was too sleepy to care.

The woman awakened from her light sleep when she heard a stirring in the manger. She too was getting cold.

"Donkey." she spoke, "Would you kindly blow in the fire? My baby is getting cold."

The donkey moved slightly, but he did not awaken.

"Donkey, would you...?"

But he did not hear. He dreamt of leisure and green grass.

"Donkey...."

In the rafters something moved. A robin, bravest of small created things, had settled there for the night. But, tired as he was, he had not slept. He had seen what had happened below.

Of all creatures that fly through the skies, it was he who had been permitted to witness the greatest event. His breast was bursting with excitement. Several times he had almost burst out into song. But he had checked himself. He must not bother the tired young woman and her baby. Tomorrow he could sing all he wanted. Now there must only be reverent silence.

"Donkey, please...?"

The robin took a look at the donkey.

Should he...?

Dare he...?

Should he...?

Dare he?

Then he flew down.

Landing in front of the dying embers, he spread his wings and closed them, opened and closed them. Faster and faster his little wings moved. The draft caused the embers to awaken. Tiny flames played around the wood.

"It works! It works!" the robin exulted.

He could no longer contain himself. As his wings moved faster and faster, he burst into song in praise of his maker.

A flame shot up, and another, and another. The fire became hotter and hotter. The heat seared the robin's breast, but he did not notice. He sang of his master who had so honored him. A flame leaped out of the fire and burned his breast. But he felt no pain.

"Enough, dear robin," the voice carried from the corner, "It is warm now, and the baby is asleep."

The robin flew a little distance away from the fire, tired but joyful.

"Dear robin," the woman whispered, "Your breast has been burnt red, and you shall keep that mark always. May the fire that made you sing to your master always burn in your breast. Now all people will see how you served your Savior."

The night was cold. But in the stable it was warm. Mother and child slept, watched over by their heavenly father and . . . a little bird with a red breast.

Taken from the December 18, 1964 issue.

Christmas past, Christmas presence ...*continued from page 19*

had planned. In fact, there was not a to-do list in sight as the shepherds dozed. Search in vain among these working stiffs for greeting cards or gifts or schedules or invitations. Notice instead the Passover lambs, unaware of their impending doom, sleeping placidly in the curl of their mother's warm body. Notice the glittering stars and the peering moon and the whisper of the west wind in the top of a nearby palm tree.

Then with wonder, look up. Look up! Look up with the shepherds and see. See, suddenly, as the scripture informs us, a multitude of the heavenly host.

See the curtain of this dream for a moment torn away. See for once the reality and not the shadow. See the vast troop of holy ones in whose train the Holy One of heaven was only shortly before escorted into this dark world. Feel the crushing weight of glory and the inexpressible joy of heaven come down, if only for one, brief, real moment.

The arrival of the Savior was not on anyone's schedule then. His arrival is not on anyone's schedule now. Even as the wind blows where it will, we are told, so it is with everyone born of the Spirit. In his grace and mercy, the Savior tears away the curtain of spiritual blindness for those who will believe. When he does, for one brief moment we glimpse our destiny, and the glory of God. And we ever after long for nothing else.

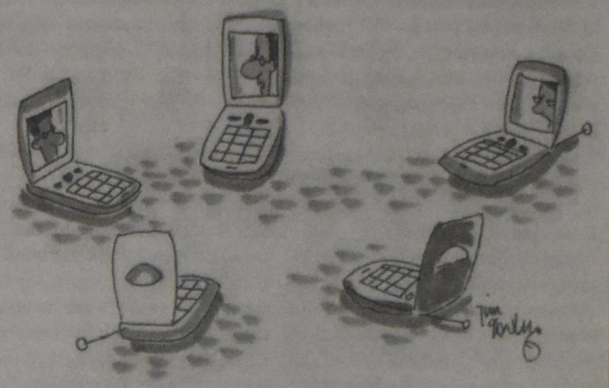
Go ahead and keep the schedule. Make the lists and give the gifts. But this year perhaps spend a little less mental energy; a little less time in the process.

Perhaps on Christmas morning wake while it is still dark and go outside. Peer into this vast universe whose glorious depths defy the mind of man. And as you gaze, remember the shepherds. Remember the heavenly hosts. Remember the joy and the weight of glory.

But more than all, remember this little One who came to rescue you.

They're all still there, you know.

May God grant us eyes to see.



Pastor Jerry, is this what they mean by "The Emerging Church"?

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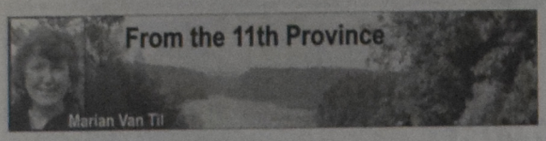
Opinion



Rifling Satan's fold

Christmas makes me feel schizophrenic. Some of you readers trained in psychiatry and psychology may chide me for using "schizophrenic" lightly. Well then, I could analyze my feeling in a more "Reformed" way. So I'll say: Christmas makes me feel dualistic – like I've got one winter boot planted in "nature" and one in "grace"!

What I'm talking about is the effect of being a Christian in today's world at Christmastime. When I was a child in the 1950s, our family and church celebrations of Christmas were generally reinforced by collective society's notion of Christmas. That's not to say that all North Americans devoutly acknowledged Christ's birth and its implications for the world. We all know they didn't. There was Santa Claus (who had long since ceased to bear resemblance to the real St. Nicolas). And parties, then as now, where liquor flowed too freely and clouded judgement. And family gatherings where strained relationships caused tongues to cut deeply. And many other places where the Spirit of Christ was absent. Human nature, at its unredeemed core, was no less rotten then than now. But society in general accepted Christmas as a religious holiday (with vestiges of "holy day") worthy of national celebration.

Now, that is far from true. Year by year there is a clearer, starker divide between Christian celebrations of Christmas and "The Holidays" observed by the secular world and by nominal worshipers. I suspect that in the not too distant future, someone somewhere in the U.S. is going to sue to have the name Christmas dropped entirely from December 25, replaced by something less "offensive" to practicing pagans and practical atheists, not to mention (they will say) Jews, Muslims, Hindus, etc.

A few years ago the superintendent of the local public schools in my area decided that students' use of the greeting "Merry Christmas" would offend the small handful of Muslims and Hindus attending those schools (though no one had made a complaint). The phrase was thus banned. In fact, a student who had entered a regional poster contest and had incorporated into his poster the last line of Clement Moore's "The Night Before Christmas" ("Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night") was forced to eliminate that phrase. People publicly complained; but mostly they just groused among themselves, and the decision stood.

It's now hard to find "religious" Christmas cards (oops, Holiday cards) at stores that used to routinely sell them. And very few stores play the once universally known Christian carols. Even a number of my Catholic school students know the first verse of only a couple such carols because they simply aren't exposed to them at home, on the radio or Internet. At church they sing them only on Christmas Day and the Sunday after. In their classrooms too many teachers substitute "upbeat" songs like "Jingle Bell Rock" (on the assumption, I guess, that shallow frivolity will trump true joy in kids' hearts every time).

I've heard at least one person say: The Christian veneer covering societal Christmas celebrations of the last century and more was just that, a veneer. At least things are more honest now, and we know where we stand. I'm not sure I'd call it honesty, but I agree that the chasm between Christ followers and the secular world is widening, and the evidence is particularly obvious at Christmastime. We *do* know where we stand. And it does require *taking* a stand. Not just around Christmas, of course. Always. Alone and with others. And in all things. ("Here I stand, I can do no other.")

So my Christmas "schizophrenia" is really a result of that looming division between the sheep and the goats. At home and church I feel like I'm bathed in "Grace"; and "Nature" takes over with a vengeance in the world of the shopping centre, the media, and the corporation. (Are my Roman Catholic brothers and sisters unduly influencing me?) That old Nature-Grace dichotomy isn't any way to look at the world, well-taught Reformed Christian school or university students will pointedly say. Quite true: there are no separate, ne'er-the-twain-shall-meet worlds of Grace and Nature. God's Spirit is everywhere at work in the world, and no realm is inherently devoid of that work and its results. But I have to admit, it sometimes sure feels like it. And, to me, it particularly does at Christmastime.

What follows below is not my strategy for combating the secular world's God-denying Christmas Spirit. (Having been rather under the weather of late, I'm not quite up to that!) That project needs careful, concerted, communal effort as well as individual commitment. What follows, rather, are *words* – a few poetic verses – that delightfully ruminate on the strange wonder of *the Word* made flesh; words that acknowledge the skin-bones-and-blood bound Word as kingly Victor of our deadly self-started war with Satan (whose battles, still ongoing, I find so doubly troubling at Christmas).

These are classic stanzas, written in a meaning-dense poetic English unfamiliar to the every-day ears of most of us. But several careful (out loud!) readings will unravel their riches. I hope they call up for you the comfort and joy of Christ's Incarnation as they have for me.

⌘⌘⌘⌘⌘⌘⌘⌘⌘

The English language's best poets were drawn to considering the astonishing paradox of God becoming man: "The Word who can no word speak"; "The bird that built the nest is hatched therein." Robert Southwell (1561-1595) was a Jesuit who was imprisoned, tortured and hanged by Elizabeth I on a charge of treason. (The year he was ordained,1584, all Catholic priests were given 40 days to leave England, but Southwell remained.) To the moment of his death, he denied any intent to overthrow the Protestant Elizabeth. Southwell wrote most of his poetry while in prison.

The Nativity of Christ

Behold the father is his daughter's son,
The bird that built the nest is hatched therein,
The old of years an hour hath not outrun,
Eternal life to live doth now begin,
The Word is dumb, the mirth of heaven doth weep,
Might feeble is, and force doth faintly creep.

O dying souls, behold your living spring;
O dazzled eyes, behold your sun of grace;
Dull ears, attend what word this Word doth bring;
Up, heavy hearts, with joy your joy embrace.
From death, from dark, from deafness, from despairs
This life, this light, this Word, this joy repairs.

Gift better than himself God doth not know;
Gift better than his God no man can see.
This gift doth here the giver given bestow;
Gift to this gift let each receiver be.
God is my gift, himself he freely gave me;
God's gift am I, and none but God shall have me.

Man altered was by sin from man to beast;
Beast's food is hay, hay is all mortal flesh.
Now God is flesh and lies in manger pressed
As hay, the brutest sinner to refresh.
O happy field wherein that fodder grew,
Whose taste doth us from beasts to men renew.

Robert Southwell

John Donne (1572-1633) grew up a Roman Catholic in Elizabethan England, and had several priestly relatives executed by Elizabeth. He himself studied theology but went over to the Church of England about the time Southwell's life was abruptly ended. Donne then took his faith very seriously, even becoming Dean of London's St. Paul's Cathedral. He is one of the greatest of all English poets. In two connecting sonnets he explores the Incarnation's contradictions:

Annunciation

Salvation to all that will is nigh;
That All, which always is all everywhere,
Which cannot sin, and yet all sins must bear,
Which cannot die, yet cannot choose but die,
Lo, faithful virgin, yields Himself to lie
In prison, in thy womb; and though He there
Can take no sin, nor thou give, yet He will wear,
Taken from thence, flesh, which death's force may try.

Ere by the spheres time was created, thou
Wast in His mind, who is thy Son and Brother;
Whom thou conceivst, conceived; yea thou art now
Thy Maker's maker, and thy Father's mother;
Thou hast light in dark, and shutst in little room,
Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb.

Nativity

Immensity cloistered in thy dear womb,
Now leaves His well-belov'd imprisonment,
There He hath made Himself to His intent
Weak enough, now into the world to come;
But O, for thee, for Him, hath the inn no room?
Yet lay Him in this stall, and from the Orient,
Stars and wise men will travel to prevent
The effect of Herod's jealous general doom.
Seest thou, my soul, with thy faith's eyes, how He
Which fills all place, yet none holds Him, doth lie?
Was not His pity towards thee wondrous high,
That would have need to be pitied by thee?
Kiss Him, and with Him into Egypt go,
With His kind mother, who partakes thy woe.

John Donne

Another work by Southwell is one I got to know through 20th century English composer Benjamin Britten's *Ceremony of Carols* ("This little Babe so few days old is come to rifle Satan's fold..."). Britten's work for boys' choir and harp uses stanzas from Southwell's *New Heaven, New War*. (The repeated staccato strumming of the harp and fast, jagged, overlapping choral rhythms are immensely effective in conveying the meaning of Southwell's text. But ironically and sadly, Britten professed to be an atheist.)

Southwell considers the paradox of heaven and earth being reunited through the pitiful weakness and unimaginable strength of "this little Babe" who will "surprise the gates of hell." Satan's enlisting us in his war with God required Christ's coming, to win that war lest we perish. But we had best stick by his side, because there are still battles to fight before the ultimate victory celebration.

New Heaven, New War

Come to your heaven, you heavenly choirs,
Earth hath the heaven of your desires;
Remove your dwelling to your God,
A stall is now his best abode;
Sith men their homage do deny,
Come, Angels, all their fault supply.

His chilling cold doth heat require,
Come, Seraphins, in lieu of fire;
This little Ark no cover hath,
Let Cherubs' wings his body swath;
Come, Raphael, this Babe must eat,
Provide our little Tobie meat.

Let Gabriel be now his groom,
That first took up his earthly room;
Let Michael stand in his defence,
Whom love hath link'd to feeble sense;
Let Graces rock when he doth cry,
Let Angels sing his lullaby.

The same you saw in heavenly seat,
Is he that now sucks Mary's teat;
Agonize your King a mortal wight,
His borrowed weed lets not your sight;
Come, kiss the manger where he lies,
That is your bliss above the skies.

Continued on page 22...

Christmas Greetings

This little Babe so few days old,
Is come to rifle Satan's fold;
All hell doth at his presence quake,
Though he himself for cold do shake;
For in this weak, unarmed wise,
The gates of hell he will surprise.

With tears he fights and wins the field,
His naked breast stands for a shield;
His battering shot are babish cries,
His arrows made of weeping eyes,
His martial ensigns cold and need,
And feeble flesh his warrior's steed.

His camp is pitched in a stall,
His bulwark but a broken wall;
The crib his trench, hay stalks his stakes,
Of shepherds he his muster makes;
And thus as sure his foe to wound,
The Angels' trumps alarum sound.

My soul with Christ join thou in fight,
Stick to the tents that he hath dight;
Within his crib is surest ward,
This little Babe will be thy guard;
If thou wilt foil thy foes with joy,
Then flit not from the heavenly boy.

Robert Southwell

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier *from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY; she may be contacted via e-mail at <mvantil@adelphia.net>*

O come, O come Immanuel!

The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son,
and they will call him Immanuel – which means God with us.
Matthew 1:23

These residents of Holland Christian Homes offer their greetings for a blessed and happy Christmas and New Year to family, friends, and neighbors.

Dirk P. & Rie S. Jongkind	*HT 714*	*Johanna Kienecker*	*TT 310*
Clarence & Sya Dykstra	*PT 703*	*Bill & Aska Braam*	*HT 509*
Zwier & Ann Adriaanse	*HT 512*	*Rennie Kamphuis-Schroor*	*TT 508*
Truus Baker	*HT 410*	*Tieny DenOtter*	*PT 305*
Peter Veenstra	*TT 116*	*De TenHaaf*	*HT 505*
Peter & Jenny Hensen	*HT 502*	*C. VanderWoude*	*TT 509*
Grace Siekers	*TT 408*	*Tine VanHouten*	*HT 705*
Truus deBruyn	*HT 707*	*Tilly Hoekstra*	*HT 611*
Femmie Martens	*CT 1201*	*William & Paula Vander Meer*	*HT 713*
Berendina Eggengoor	*CT 408*	*Peter & Jenny VanEgmond*	*PcT 1305*
F. & L. Greidanus	*PT 202*	*Janette Kooistra*	*GM 307*
Harry & Betty Roffel	*TT 516*	*Louw & Willy VanMarrum*	*KT 203*
Hank & Janny DeWolde	*HT 312*	*Immie Booy*	*KT 1005*
Trudy Greydanus	*HT 314*	*Stan & Dorothy Antonides*	*KT 1303*
Wilma Bremer	*CT 501*		

Christmas Greetings from
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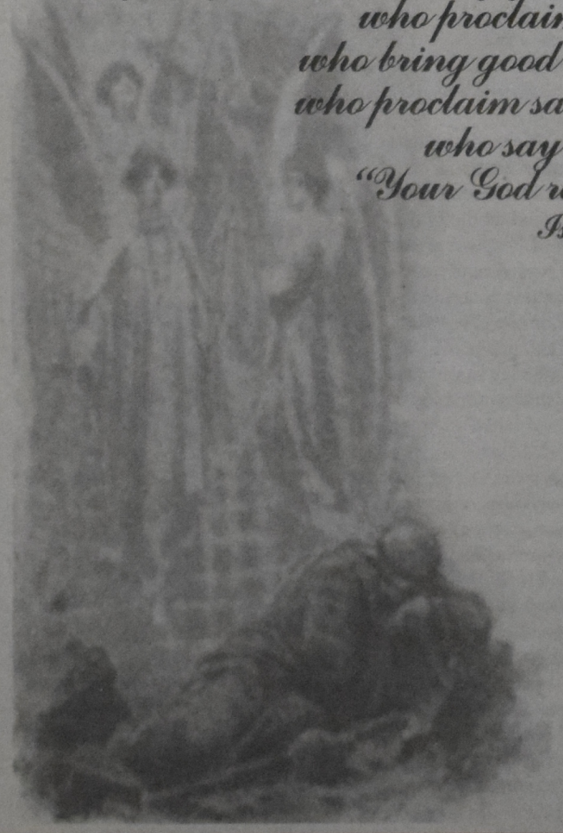
How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of those who bring good news
who proclaim peace
who bring good tidings
who proclaim salvation
who say to Zion
"Your God reigns!"
Isaiah 52:7



The residents of

Shalom Manor

a Christian Long Term Care Facility in Grimsby, Ontario,
convey to their loved ones and friends,
their best wishes in this Christmas Season and for the New Year 2005.

The following Residents of Shalom Manor have requested that their names be included in the 2005 Christmas Greetings edition of Christian Courier.

Mrs. Hendrika Bezuyen
Mrs. Menk Broere
Mrs. Nel Broerse
Mrs. Aleida Buesink
Mrs. Liesbeth Colenbrander
Mrs. Sophia Dekker
Mr. Arthur & Mrs. Susan de Boer
Mrs. Lois de Vries
Mr. Jacob de Vries
Mrs. Trijntje de Witte
Mr. Jurrien & Mrs. Mary Drenth
Mr. Peter Ellens
Mrs. Theresa Guther
Mrs. Margje Hagen
Mr. Peter Hamming
Mr. Dirk Heikoop
Mrs. Fenna Hemrica
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Ms. Rany Hofland
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Mr. John & Mrs. Tina Kramer
Mrs. Hannah Krikke
Mrs. Wilma Lychlama
Mr. Pieter Manni
Mrs. Jacqueline Noordzij
Mr. George & Mrs. Anneke Plantinga
Mrs. Nienke (Tina) Prins
Miss Ina Prinzen
Mrs. Maria Proper
Mr. Andries Rijnberk
Mr. Clarence Rowaan
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ELIM Village

Elim Village is located on 20 acres in the heart of Surrey's Fleetwood area. Operated by the Elim Housing Society, a non-profit organization, Elim Village is a unique Christian Retirement Community. When fully developed it will be home to some 700 seniors and will offer a wide variety of housing and care options. More than 125 Independent Living apartments and duplexes are now completed. Construction is currently underway on 109 Independent Plus Living apartments with a completion date of August, 2005.

PLEASE NOTE: The interest earned will fluctuate during the five-year term as the Royal Bank prime rate fluctuates and could pay up to 7% p.a.

This is not to be construed as an offer to solicit investments and no investment can be made until the investor has received an Information Statement issued by Elim Housing Society.

Investments can be made within an RRSP or RIF shorter term investments are also available.

We presently offer Royal Bank prime plus one percent

for instance, on Oct. 24, 2005 Elim was accruing interest at **5.75%** p.a.

Call Jake & Jenny DeWeerd 604 583~3546
Presentation Centre: 9089 - 160th Ave. Surrey, British Columbia

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Classifieds

Anniversaries

CELEBRATING GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. Jeremiah 17:7

1955 December 9 2005

William & Margaret Colyn (née Knegt)

along with their children and grandchildren
will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary with an

OPEN HOUSE

on December 27, 2005 from 2 to 4 pm
at Mountainview Christian Reformed Church,
290 Main Street, Grimsby, ON (Bartlett Exit off QEW)

With thanks to God and great joy, we invite you to celebrate with us.

Joe & Joanne Colyn, Justin & Andrea, Chris, Lauren, Erika • Marg & Theo Hoekstra, Darrell, Katrina, Rosanne, Joshua, Harrison, Grant • James Colyn • Anita & Ron Prange, Luke, Jill • Dorothy & Rudy Van Amelsvoort, Jason, Dustin, Lindsay, Cameron • Sylvia & Isaac Van Geest, Isaac John, Greg, Michael • David & Alyanne Colyn

BEST WISHES ONLY

• mail: 34 Diana Ave., Grimsby, ON, L3M 3R4 • tel: 905.309.2268 • e-mail: colyn@sympatico.ca

---

1955 December 16 2005

Unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain.
Psalm 127:1

With praise and thanksgiving to the Lord for all his goodness,
We announce the **50th Wedding Anniversary**
of our parents & grandparents

STEPHEN AND MARIE ELGERSMA (nee GROEN)

Dad and Mom, Grandpa and Grandma,
Thank you for your example of faith and love
in your marriage and all of life.

With love from your children and grandchildren:
Liz & Henry Westerhof – Christal, Jacob, Marijka
Rick & Jackie Elgersma – Lindsay & Brent, Meaghan, Nicole, Stephen
Jerry & Betty Ann Elgersma – Andrew, Jeremy, Eric, Kristen, Austin
Steve & Sharon Elgersma – Joel, Mark, David, Laura, Calvin
Phil & Marlene Elgersma – Matthew, Stephanie, Rachel, Sarah, Jacob
Cheryl & Victor VanHerk – Levi, Jessica, Rebecca

Open House will be held on Saturday, December 17, 2005
1:30 to 3:30 p.m. at Zion United Reformed Church, Sheffield

Home address: 1323 5th Concession W RR#2
Waterdown ON L0R 2H2

REV. JELLE AND ALIDA NUTMA (nee Brouwer)

Look forward to celebrating their
50th Wedding Anniversary on December 23, 2005 D.V.

Mom and Dad, Pake and Beppe
Thank you for your love and faith in the Lord during all these years.
May you continue to know and experience God's blessings
in your life together.

With love from your children and grandchildren:
Harry & Miriam Nutma, *Calgary AB*
Jeremy & Joanna (Sidney), Greg, Andrew & Heather, Alex, Alida, Levi, Caleb
Sid & Alice Nutma, *Wyoming, Ont.*
Ryan & Katie, Robbie, Kurtis, Kyle, Olivia
Richard & Margaret Klok, *Taber, AB*
Jesse, Danae, Josh, Brady
Jeff & Faith Hogeveen, *Smithville, Ont.*
Kristen, Charles, Alisha, Jessica
Andrew & Darlene, *Terrace, BC*
Sara, Cole, Liam

Open House will be held on Friday, December 23, 2005
1:30 - 3:30 at the Mountainview CRC in Grimsby
Best wishes only please.

Home address: #202 - 275 Main St E, Grimsby ON L3M 5N8

Obituaries

JANTINA (Tina) VAN BEILEN-TRENNING

Nieuw Buinen — Mississauga
The Netherlands — Ontario
December 12, 1925 — November 15, 2005

Surely goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever. Psalm 23: vs. 6

Peacefully at the Trillium Health Centre,
in the presence of her family,
the LORD took home his child in her 80th year

Beloved wife, mother and grandmother of:
Engel Van Beilen
Lynn Vis
Al & Monique Van Beilen
Christopher, Andrew

Contact address: E. Van Beilen
3650 Kaneff Cres. Suite 2105
Mississauga ON L5A 4A1
etvan@sympatico.ca

May 23, 1930 — November 16, 2005
Doezum — Brampton
The Netherlands — Canada

JOHN (Jan) VANDERLAAN

I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail.
Luke 22:32

Peacefully in his sleep,
Jesus took home my dear Jan.

Most loved husband of Margo (for 50 years)
Loving father to:
Clarence & Irene Vanderlaan, *Madoc*
Arlene & Michael Whitehead, *Guelph*
Jacqueline & Rick Elgersma, *Dunnville*
Ron & Kathy Vanderlaan, *Lansing, MI*
Marianne & Jeff Schenk, *Georgetown*
Loving grandfather to his 15 grandchildren
and 2 great-grandchildren
Loved brother to Bert, *Acton* and Gerry, *Clarkson*
and his many brothers- and sisters-in-law.

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
Psalm 91:1

Condolences may be sent to:
Margo Vanderlaan
1504-35 Kingknoll Drive
Brampton ON L6Y 5G5

Pastor Richard Grift officiated
at the Interment and Celebration Service.

Words can't even begin to express our thanks for the overwhelming support we have received from our extended faith community. We have truly experienced the communion of saints.
Praise to him who is faithful.

Soerakarta, Indonesia — Brantford
1926 — 2005

On November 10, 2005, the Lord called home
our husband, father and grandfather,

GERRIT (Gerry) CORNELIS VAN EYK

He will be missed by his wife of 50 years, Maria (Leutscher)
and his children and grandchildren:
Sylvia & William van Wyngaarden – Bethany, Mallory
Elaine & Dirk van Wyngaarden – Adam, Lucas, and Karen
Peter Van Eyk

Gerry will also be mourned by his sister & brother-in-law,
Lies & Coen Flach, *the Netherlands*
and by sisters- and brothers-in-law:
Fem & Paul de Kluis, *the Netherlands*
Berta & Ploon Sterkenburg, *the Netherlands*
Corrie 't Mannetje, *Ancaster*
Winnie Leutscher, *Hamilton*
Henny & Johan van Wichen, *the Netherlands*
Gea Leutscher, *the Netherlands*

The Lord will keep you from all harm, he will watch over your life;
the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.
Psalm 121:7,8

Correspondence: Maria Van Eyk
35 Avondale Street, Brantford ON N3S 4L7

Birthday

Happy birthday to

Wietse VanderMeer

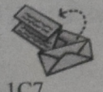
for his **90th Birthday** on November 19.

Congratulations and love from his wife
Jantje and all his family.

Job 12:12

Personals

Single Christian woman from Southwestern Ontario would like to correspond/meet a Christian man.
Reply to File #2749
c/o Christian Courier
1 Hiscott St
St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7



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December 23, 8.00 pm
CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,
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2ND ANNUAL CHRISTMAS SING-A-LONG CONCERT
with the Liberation Choir.
This year's guests:
the Ambassadors Male Choir.
Organist: Willem van Suijdam,
Director: Harold de Haan.
Pianist: Laura Pin.
Guest Soprano Soloist:
Melissa Gonsalves
Admission: FREE.
Collection during concert:
all proceeds to WORLD WIDE CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS.

DUTCH COMMUNITY CHRISTMAS SONG SERVICE

Welkom

Sunday, December 4
7:30 p.m. at the
Emmanuel Ref. Church
170 Clarke St. North, **Woodstock**

Service led by
Pastor Case Koolhaas
Babysitting is provided.
Refreshments served
after the service.
We hope that you all can come.

A Christmas present for you; a Christmas present for Sierra Leone

Rachel Dierolf and Chandra Pasma offer you the gift of music and Jo Kuyvenhoven of storytelling. A medley of folktales, music, laughter and sometimes poignancy are unleashed as wooden shoes meet flip flops and classic tunes. This promises to be an evening of laughter, delight and celebration of God's goodness in the midst of sometimes anguish. Sierra Leone is, after all, the poorest nation in the world.

A freewill offering will be taken for literacy work in Sierra Leone (CRWRC/CRWM).
Please join us at 7:30 p.m. on **December 17** at Calvin CRC located at 1475 Merivale Road, Ottawa.
(Suitable for ages 5 – 105)

Job Opportunities

For Rent

BEAMSVILLE -3 BEDROOM (main floor) $1150 a month. Quiet subdivision, near QEW. Utilities, central air and use of washer + dryer included. No pets/ smoking. Available immediately. Call Jacob at **905-562-8832** after 6 pm

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For more information, contact our website at www.cccvictoria.ca

The Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRCNA) announces the search process to fill the position of:

Executive Director of the CRCNA

It is anticipated that this senior executive position will be filled by action of the CRCNA Synod 2006 upon nomination by the Board of Trustees of the CRCNA. Suggestions or nominations of a potential candidate are solicited. Individuals wishing to be considered or desiring more information can request an application packet at the address listed below. The search committee will begin its selection process no later than early 2006, but the committee will consider all nominations and applicants until the nomination is submitted to the Board of Trustees.

The Executive Director position requires the candidate to be an ordained minister in the CRCNA. The selected candidate will be, or must indicate a willingness to become, a member of the CRCNA. In keeping with the CRCNA Equal Opportunity Policy, persons who are members of an ethnic community are encouraged to apply.

The CRCNA is a binational denomination (Canada and the U.S.A.) in the Reformed tradition of the Christian faith. Further information can be found on the CRCNA website at www.crcna.org. Questions and requests for hard-copy materials should be sent to:

Mr. William B. Weidenaar, chairman
Executive Director Search Committee
Ruff, Weidenaar & Reidy Ltd.
222 N. LaSalle Street - Suite 700
Chicago, IL 60601
Email: wbweiden@rwrlaw.com
Fax: (312) 263-1345

The Christian Reformed Church (CRC) announces the initiation of a search process to fill the position of:

DIRECTOR

Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) - Canada

It is anticipated that this senior executive position will be filled by actions of the Board of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee and the Board of Trustees of the Christian Reformed Church in North America.

This position is responsible for the administration and implementation of the work of CRWRC in Canada and internationally, the promotion of CRWRC to its constituency, and maintaining an effective liaison with CRWRC – U.S. and other agencies of the CRCNA.

The successful candidate should have a strong sense of compassion for the poor and a commitment to working collaboratively within a bi-national structure. Experience working with international partners and/or in another cross-cultural context is essential. The qualified applicant should have university degree (Masters preferred) with 10 years management experience in a non-profit environment.

In keeping with principles of gender and racial equity, all candidates will be considered based upon their qualifications and experience.

To nominate individuals in writing or to confidentially apply for this position, send a copy of your resume and a letter of interest by **December 15, 2005** to the mailing or email address below.

To obtain more information about the position or the selection process, request an application packet from the mailing or email address below.

Shirley Vandenberg, Chair
Search Committee
c/o **CRWRC – Canada**
3475 Mainway, PO Box 5070, STN LCD 1
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8

Fax: 905-336-8344
Email: crwrc-search@crcna.ca

Additional information can be found on the CRCNA website at www.crcna.org or CRWRC website at www.crwrc.org.

Applicants will be considered until the Search Committee has made its selection of a nominee.

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in Oakville, Ontario

A full-time staff position in the area of Youth Ministry has recently become available. We would like to hear from you if you have a deep love for the Lord, a great passion for working with youth and their leaders, and the ability to work in a team environment. Specific training in the area of youth ministry and a desire to preach occasionally would be an asset. Please direct inquiries and resumes to:

ClearView Church,
2300 Sheridan Garden Drive, Oakville ON L6J 7R2
Attn: Ministry Staffing.
or email **mail@clearviewchurch.com** Subject Line: Ministry Staffing.
For more information about our church, please visit www.clearviewchurch.com

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Mutual Support Systems of the Niagara Region, a non-profit agency providing residential care and treatment for children invites applications for the position of House Parents. An ideal career choice for a married couple to work together in meaningful ministry, these are full-time, salaried, live-in positions for both partners. Our House Parents are the heart and soul of the Mutual Support program. See our web site for more program information. Please contact:

Randy Klassen
Associate Director – Human Resources
792 Canboro Rd., Fenwick ON L0S 1C0 Tel: 905 892 4332
rklassen@mutualsupport.net www.mutualsupport.net

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Mathematics Faculty (Possible Opening)
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Teach selected BSN completion courses; course development opportunities in the areas of Family, Community and Public Health and Professional Practice development. Master's degree and current license or eligibility for licensure as professional nurse in Iowa required.

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Youth Ministry and Biblical Studies Faculty
Teach general education courses in biblical theology, a section of the first-term seminar, and courses related to the youth ministry emphasis

To learn more about a position and receive application materials, qualified persons committed to a Reformed, biblical perspective and educational philosophy are encouraged to send a letter of interest and curriculum vita/resume to:

Dr. Rockne McCarthy
Vice President for Academic Affairs
Dordt College
498 4th Ave. NE
Sioux Center, IA 51250-1697

Facsimile: 712 722-4496
E-mail: vpaa@dordt.edu
Web site: www.dordt.edu/offices/academic_affairs

Dordt College is an equal opportunity institution that strongly encourages the applications of women, minorities, and disabled persons.

See page 26 for more job opportunities.

Job Opportunities/ Advertising

ELEMENTARY/SECONDARY PRINCIPAL

Maranatha Christian Academy is an interdenominational school serving Christian families in Windsor since 1985. Current enrollment is 244 consisting of 194 elementary, and 50 high school students. An experienced staff of 20 serves students from JK to 12.

The ideal candidate will be an experienced administrator with strong organizational, spiritual, educational, communication and leadership skills. This dynamic individual will interact with the Christian community to promote our vision. This position is strictly administrative with no teaching responsibilities.

Interested applicants should send a current resume, statement of faith and statement of commitment to Christian education to:

Principal Search Committee
Maranatha Christian Academy
939 Northwood, Windsor ON N9E 1A2

Or by email to: **rnicoletti@cogeco.ca**

WALLACEBURG CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

is an inter-denominational school established to serve the Dresden and Wallaceburg and surrounding area. This is a school of 75 students served by a great staff of dedicated teachers and supported by 42 families. We are looking for a new teaching **principal** who has a vision for leading a small school to future growth and striving for excellence in Christian education. Interested individuals should send their resumes, statement of faith, references and philosophy of education to:

Wallaceburg Christian School
Principal Search Committee
693 Albert St , Wallaceburg ON N8A 1Y8

Applications invited for the position of **part-time**

Development Director (DD).

The DD will develop, implement and oversee programs to generate donor relations and corporate sponsorships as well as act as advisor for current and future fundraising activities. The successful candidate will possess abilities to share the school's vision with the community at large and gain financial support and commitments to the school, and be capable of using up-to-date software for communicating with and tracking donors. For further information, please contact the principal. Deadline for application: Jan 30, 2006 Send applications to:

John Calvin Christian School
c/o Mr. Bob Moore, principal
286 Water Street, Guelph ON N1G 1B8

or by email: **principal@JCCS.ca** Website: www.jccs.ca

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Events

CHRISTMAS CONCERT
Friday, December 16,
7:30 p.m.
at the
Clinton Christian Reformed Church.
Featuring Renee Stalenhoef, a gifted soloist and Ian Sadler, internationally recognized organist, hosted by male chorus
"MEN OF NOTE"
of Clinton Ont.
For tickets:
Phone **519 565 2479,**
or 519 482 8671

December 11
DUTCH SERVICE
will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m.
Rev. Henry DeBolster will be preaching.

Tot Ziens

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Information available from:
Rosanne van der Woerd, 3260 New St. Unit 109,
Burlington ON L7N 3L4 905-639-9054

Website at: http://home.worldchat.com/~hordyk/MaranathaHomes.html

Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Dec. 2 Christmas Concert, 7:30 p.m. Georgetown Christian Reformed Church 11611 Travalgar Road **Georgetown**.Ont. Featuring: Brampton Christian Male Choir **"Choraliers"**. Tickets $10 Available from the choir members or at the door or phone John Ponsen **905 456 8904** E-Mail j.j.ponsen@sympatico.ca

Dec. 4 Dutch Christmas Song Service, Emmanuel CRC, 170 Clarke St, **Woodstock,** Ont. 7:30 p.m. See ad this issue.

Dec.11 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Henry DeBolster will be preaching.

Dec 14 Christmas at Home with the Ambassadors. First CRC, **Hamilton**, 8 p.m. See ad this issue.

Dec 16 Christmas Concert 7.30 p.m. at the Clinton CRC. **Clinton** Ontario. For tickets: Phone 519 565 2479, or 519 482 8671 See ad this issue for details.

Dec 17 A Christmas present for you; a Christmas present for Sierra Leone. A medley of folktales, music, laughter and sometimes poignancy are unleashed as wooden shoes meet flip flops and classic tunes. An evening of laughter, delight and celebration of God's goodness in the midst of sometimes anguish. 7:30 p.m. at Calvin CRC,1475 Merivale Road, **Ottawa**. Please see this issue for details.

Dec 23 2nd annual Christmas sing-a-long concert with the Liberation Choir, 8.00 p.m. at Central Presbyterian Church, Hamilton,ON. See details in ad this issue.

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Visit us at: www.dca-travel.com
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"The Passionate Immigrant"

is a book about the Dutch immigrant told in an engaging and enchanting way. It is essentially a love story about two young people who are faced with several trials in post-war Holland from which they need to escape.
It is a wonderful and personal Christmas gift.
To learn more about the book, please visit www.glendadevries.com. You can also order it through Chapters on line. You can purchase it there, or you can order it by sending a cheque or money order for $26.38 (includes taxes and shipping), along with your address to:

Glenda de Vries, c/o 1494323 Ontario Inc.
250 Shields Court Unit 15, Markham Ontario L3R 9W7

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Faith ❄ Justice ❄ Politics

The board and staff of Citizens for Public Justice wish you a Blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year!

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And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth... *John 1:14a*

May the reality of the Incarnation be the source of your celebration this Christmas!

SYL GERRITSMA

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ON L2M 2L3
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We wish God's blessing to all our friends and supporters through the holiday season and the coming year.

Merry Christmas!

From the National Board and Staff of the Christian Labour Association of Canada

clac

Merry Christmas and Best Wishes For The New Year

From all of us at

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Greetings of the Season and Best wishes for the New Year

GVE
GARY VAN EYK, CMA
50 Lakeport Rd. Ste 201
St. Catharines, ON L2N 4P7
Ph: 905-646-7331

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.
Luke 2:14

From my family to yours,

Merry Christmas!

Clarence Weima
Phone: **1-800-488-9817**
clarence.weima@investorsgroup.com